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# ON THE BOOK OF JONAH

A Monograph.

*A CONTRIBUTION TO THE EVIDENCE OF ITS  
HISTORIC TRUTH.*

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## PREFACE.

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THE main question which has to be determined with reference to the Book of Jonah is, whether it really is what it seems to be, the history of a mission to which the son of Amittai, who lived in the days of Jeroboam II., was called by the word of the Lord; or whether it is more or less an imaginary creation, and that of a much later date than the lifetime of the historical Jonah. My contention is that it is a record of facts, and neither fiction, myth, nor allegory; that its composition is contemporaneous with the events which it records; and that no valid reason has been or can be shown why the prophet himself should not be regarded as, in the strictest sense, its author. This conclusion may be scouted by some as "conservative," but it is not the less likely to be true on that account. The *Zeitgeist*, scarcely less variable than the wind which bloweth where it listeth, is no test of truth, nor even a presumption in favour of greater probability. I for one decline to bow to the authority

of great names, which are often appealed to as sufficient answer, without reason, to those who differ from them, and who do give reasons for the difference. The tyranny of tradition is declaimed against: let the tyranny of newness and modernness be placed in the same category. If an old man who, during nearly sixty years of active ministerial life, has seen many changes both of popular and critical opinion, may venture to offer a word of counsel to the votaries of "newness," it would be this, not to assume that the theories which "fascinate" them are of a certainty the very end and goal of all the thinking that has gone before, the very fulness of truth. Let them not resent a recommendation to cultivate humility, and not to indulge in the presumption that those who do not accept their conclusions are blind, and therefore unable to see light which to others is as the light of day.

History is not to be confounded with tradition. The aim of this monograph is to exhibit the book in its true *historical* environment, and its significance in the relations of the mission of Jonah, both to Israel and to Assyria. The wonderment with which it is often regarded, and which awakens suspicion and doubt, will be lessened, if it do not entirely disappear, when it is studied in the light of its historical connections. Isolated from these, many critics do not seem to know what to think of it; and their thinkings, such as they are, yield themselves no restful satisfaction.

I have not consciously evaded any difficulty. Those who acknowledge the right of the book to a place in the Old Testament Canon, avow that it is not the miracle of the great fish that occasions their doubt of the historicity of the book. But it is evident that they look askance on the story of that miracle. And it would not be far from the truth to say that, but for that story, other difficulties would be greatly diminished. (See Chapter II.) With one eminent critic, "the greatest of the improbabilities" is the alleged conversion of the people of Nineveh—a matter in regard to which there seems to me to be much misunderstanding, which I endeavour to remove in Chapter IV. With another critic the greatest difficulty is the absence of any allusion to the mission of Jonah in any other part of the Old Testament—a difficulty which I have considered fully in Chapter VI. The information kindly supplied by a member of the Royal Asiatic Society respecting the condition of Nineveh in the days of Jonah and Jeroboam II. (pages 18, 19, 52) will probably be new to most readers.

If any apology be necessary for the prominence which I give to the opinions of Dr. C. H. H. Wright, author of *Bampton and Donellan Lectures*, it will be found in my sincere appreciation of his writings. The very design of his *Essay* was, he tells us, "to be a defence of the Book of Jonah," and he believes that the book is more safely

defended as “a divinely constructed allegory” than as “a purely historical narrative.” Whether I have proved that in this he is mistaken, the reader will judge.

Perhaps it should be added that Chapters IV. and VIII. have appeared as articles in *The Thinker*, the latter in April, and the former in December, 1894.

The subject of this monograph has some bearing on very important “burning questions” of the present day; and, although in itself it may seem to be of minor importance, it is not without interest, significance, and material relations to the defence of Old Testament history.

*December, 1894.*



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# THE BOOK OF JONAH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

THE Minor Prophets, as they are called, were known as a single book, under the designation of "The Twelve Prophets," as early as the days of the Son of Sirach, the author of Ecclesiasticus (chapter xlix. 10), probably about B.C. 200. When they were first collected into a unity, or, as we should say, bound into one volume, we have no certain means of knowing. Ewald considers it probable that "The book of the so-called minor prophets was closed by Malachi's own hand." Von Orelli says, "It is probable that the majority of them were found together in a special collection even before the Exile. In the following times also the twelve were always regarded as one Canonical book."

That the original twelve are the twelve which have come down to us, and that what they are now they were when they were first collected into one, is not questioned. So that in the matter of prophetic authority there is no difference between them and the larger prophetic books which precede them.

Of the twelve, it will be observed that six contain express statements of the times in which they were written, or at least of the times in which the prophets ministered. A seventh, Malachi, might be added to this list, for it bears on the face of it that it is the last of the series, and the question of its date can be a question of only a few years. Five of them are absolutely without date—Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, and Habbakuk—and we have to rely on such internal indications of the periods of their origin as either our knowledge or our imagination may discover. The principle, if any, which determined the place of each book among the twelve, whether we take the Septuagint order or the Hebrew, is not patent; for example, why Micah, whose age is clearly specified, should not have immediately followed or preceded Hosea, who ministered in the same age (the one in Judah, the other in Israel), but should be separated from him by four undated prophecies, we do not know. Why Jonah should be placed between Obadiah and Micah, as it is in the Hebrew Canon, with neither of whom we know that his life had any connection, and with neither of whom it is scarcely possible that the composition of his book had any connection, we cannot discover. In the Septuagint Canon it is placed between Obadiah and Nahum, possibly because Nahum prophesied a destruction of Nineveh, from which no repentance could save it. But the seeming is that Ezra or Malachi, or whoever it was that collected and arranged the books, attached little importance to what interests us, their chronological order. It was enough for them to be assured of their prophetic origin and authority. Without this assurance they

could not have placed the Book of Jonah where they did, in the company of the books of acknowledged prophets who preceded the Exile, such as Amos, Hosea, and Micah, and of acknowledged prophets who came after, such as Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Our contemporary critics, some of whom regard the book as purely allegorical, and some as partly historical and partly allegorical, do not question its right to the place which it has always held in the Canon, and speak of it unhesitatingly as Inspired. And the argument of this tractate has to do mainly with those who to this extent are one with the author.

I have spoken of the Book of Jonah as one of the undated books of the twelve. But it has a note of time—or, at least, of connection with known time—such as none other has, in its first word, Now, or, if a more literal translation is preferred, AND. It is difficult to understand this beginning of the book without supposing that it was meant to connect it with something that went before. We find it in historical books, such as “Joshua” and “Judges,” with evident reference to histories with which these books are linked as continuations. The only prophetic book which begins with Now is that of Ezekiel, and the idea is not far-fetched that the reference is to the deportation of Jehoiachin and thousands of his people to Babylon (see verses 2 and 3). Read the story as you find it in II. Kings xxiv., and in II. Chronicles xxxvi., and then read the first verses of Ezekiel, where you are told that the word of the Lord

came to Ezekiel in the fifth year of the reign of Jehoiachin, who was himself an exile in Babylon, and you can scarcely help feeling that the Book of Ezekiel, which records his ministry among the Exiles, is connected by the word NOW or AND with the story of the Exile which took place in the first year of that king's reign. Dr. Douglas puts it thus:—"The explanation may be that Ezekiel the Priest, having the visions of the glory of Jehovah in the Exile instead of at the Temple in Jerusalem, connects this singular experience with the account of the degradation and the destruction of that temple given in the historical books."—*Handbook for Bible Classes*, p. 26.

The antecedent history with which the opening word of the Book of Jonah connects the story of that book is not far to seek. In the Second Book of Kings, chapter xiv., verse 25, we read:—

"He (Jeroboam II.) restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet which was in Gath-Hepher."

Here is a distinct statement that the second Jeroboam recovered certain lands to the Kingdom of Israel, according to a prediction of Jonah, who was known as the servant of the Lord God of Israel. This is all that is said about him in the Book of Kings. But the book which bears his name reads like a continuation of it. Let the statement in II. Kings and the

first verse of the Book of Jonah be read thus connected:—

“Jeroboam restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath, according to the word of the Lord, by Jonah the prophet. Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it: for their wickedness is come up before Me.’ But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

This, to say the least, seems natural and probable. The suggestion of Kohler, quoted by Professor Cheyne, that the book is part of a book of prophetic narratives (narratives, by the way, of whose existence we have no knowledge), and therefore connected with them by AND, may or may not be accepted. But, at least, it is an admission that the book, as we have it, should be regarded as a continuation of something going before.

If it be asked then, as it is, why the events of the Book of Jonah are not incorporated in our Book of Kings in immediate connection with the mention of Jonah, we might reply that there are other prophets whose works are not inserted in their historic connection. But, apart from this, we can see a special reason why this book was not made a part of the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. The mission of Jonah to Nineveh was no part of his ministry to Israel. It was an episode in his history, very peculiar and very important—a digression from the history of his nation—and, as such, its fitting place was by itself, as we shall see later on.

mission why?



## CHAPTER II.

### THE HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS OF THE MINISTRY OF JONAH.

THE first impression of many in regard to the Book of Jonah is not merely that there is something very peculiar about it, but that it occupies quite an isolated position in the Canon of Old Testament Scripture. The best corrective of this impression is to be found in the study of the place of this prophet in Old Testament history, including in this his relation to Elijah and Elisha, a comparison with Elijah and the time of his mission as it respects his own nation and as it respects Nineveh.

1. *The Relation of Jonah to Elijah and Elisha.*—The immediate predecessors of Jonah in the prophetic office were Elijah and Elisha, and the probability is not denied that he may have been a member of the school of the prophets of which we read in the history of these distinguished men. He may have been one of those whom Elisha taught and whom he variously employed. Elisha is in his grave but a few years when Jonah takes his place in history as a known and acknowledged prophet (II. Kings xiii. 20; xiv. 25). Now the ministry of Elijah and Elisha was, with the



exception of the incidents of the widow of Sarepta and Naaman the Syrian, exclusively a ministry for Israel, and it originated in a great and special national emergency. The sin of Ahab and Jezebel was not that which is so often ascribed to the kings of Israel—that of following the evil example of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. It was more. It was a deliberate attempt, no doubt primarily of Jezebel, the fanatical daughter of a fanatical and usurping Priest-King of Sidon, to outroot the worship of Jehovah and to restore the ancient Canaanitish worship. “There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to do that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, *according to all that the Amorites did*, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel” (I. Kings xxi. 25. See I. Kings xvi. 30—33). This distinction between devotion to Baal and ordinary idolatries after the example of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, appears in the later history (II. Kings iii. 2, 3; x. 26—29). It was a crisis in Israel such as had not occurred since Israel was a nation. The question was no less than this, whether the whole Divine plan in the calling of Abraham, the redemption from Egypt, and the establishment in Canaan was to be frustrated; in fact, whether the covenant which Jehovah made with the children of Israel when they came out of the land of Egypt (I. Kings viii. 9) was to be abandoned at the shameful bidding of Ahab and Jezebel. But God’s purpose was not to be foiled. Elijah and Elisha were raised up, Elijah especially, to combat the evil design of the enemies of Jehovah. And their ministry

was successful. With all the evils that continued to prevail, no such crisis ever occurred again.

2. *Elijah and Jonah compared.*—A comparison between Elijah and Jonah is very suggestive, and is confirmatory of our faith in the historic reality of the book. The ministry of Elijah and Elisha was attended with the occurrence of extraordinary miracles—a whole group or series of them, such as is without parallel except in the history of Moses and of Christ—that is, in laying the foundation first of Judaism and then of Christianity. There is nothing in the saving of Jonah by the great fish more wonderful or harder to believe than in the restoring of life to the dead by Elijah and Elisha, as will be shown in a chapter later on. Another point to be observed is that the miracles of these prophets were for the most part miracles of judgment. It was almost exclusively so in the case of Elijah. It is still more to our purpose to remark that not only were the miracles of Elijah miracles of judgment, but his own spirit was attuned to judgment rather than to mercy. This is only saying that, being raised up for judgment, he was fitted for the service to which he was called. Need we wonder that Jonah went on his mission in the same spirit? He was sent to denounce the wickedness of Nineveh, and to declare its speedy destruction. There was a possible contingency of repentance and forgiveness in the background, and he knew it. But it was no part of his commission, and we need not wonder overmuch that the thought of judgment and the execution of it prevailed over every other.

There is another point, the most painful, in the

character of Jonah which is not without some parallel in the case of Elijah—the spirit of self, self-importance, self-consequence, which was wounded by the mercy which God showed to the penitent Ninevites (iv. 1). In Elijah we have nothing so evil as we have in Jonah, when the sparing of Nineveh displeased him exceedingly and he was very angry. But, in a lesser degree of unworthiness, we find a manifestation of self-importance in Elijah's twice-repeated reply to the question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thy altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away" (I. Kings xix. 10). He did not lose or forget *himself* in his mission. That *his* life should be sought, he having been so jealous for the Lord his God, or that God should have allowed it to be so towards one so consciously faithful, wounded him sorely.

This brings us to another parallel between the two. Jonah said, "O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live" (iv. 3). Unworthy, we say, of a true-hearted servant of God. But Elijah did the same: "He sat down under a juniper tree, and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers" (I. Kings xix. 4).

There is another parallel which I have reserved to the last—which is a parallel and which is not. Jonah fled from the execution of his task; Elijah fled from his post. There is a difference, and I do not minimise

it. After the demonstration on Mount Carmel and the death of the prophets of Baal, Jezebel vowed the death of Elijah, and Elijah fled for his life. He deserted his post and abandoned his work. We can understand the re-action of spirit after the great excitement and tension of soul in the great battle on Mount Carmel. And we can understand a momentary failure of faith, for he was a man of like passions with ourselves. But say what we may, it was a desertion of his post. What was Jezebel's wrath, only feebleness and folly, in view of the protecting arm of Jehovah? But the prophet cowered before it, and it required the most loving and merciful discipline of the wilderness, and the still small voice, to restore him to himself and to his work.

Of Jonah we are told that when he was commanded to go to Nineveh, he rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. How could a true prophet dream of finding himself out of the presence of the Lord in any part of the world which he knew God had made? Our first impression on reading the story suggests this difficulty. But the difficulty is the same whether the story be a fact or a fiction, whether it really took place or whether it be an "imaginative creation." If it be inconceivable and incredible that a true prophet should have acted thus, it is inconceivable and incredible that a novelist—aye, an inspired novelist—should have ascribed such an action, not being real, to a true prophet. It would be a libel which his readers would resent.

As to the thing itself. More than two centuries after the days of Jonah, Jeremiah (xxiii. 23) represents God as saying, "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord,

and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." This was not the revelation of a new truth, it was an appeal to an old and acknowledged truth. Jonah could not have been ignorant of it. A moment's reflection would have shown him that, as the eye of God was on Nineveh, to which he was sent in the far east, so it must have been on Tarshish, to which he was fleeing in the far west.

But the words admit of an explanation which does not imply that the prophet was foolish enough to imagine that he could escape from the eye and hand of Jehovah. The Holy Land, as we call it, was the scene of certain visible tokens by which God made Himself locally known, and Jonah may have imagined that if he went out of the land of Israel the spirit of prophecy would not rest on him. "With an approach to exactness," says Principal Douglas, "the words may be translated, 'from being in the presence of,' or 'from being at the face of,' or, more shortly, from 'being before.' It is, for instance, the same expression as that used of Cain (Genesis iv. 16) when he left the presence of Jehovah who had been speaking with him. It is often used when speaking of persons or things which stood in the manifested presence of Jehovah, say at the tabernacle or temple, and went or were taken away, as in Jeremiah xxxiii. 18. As a prophet Jonah stood before Jehovah; this was the favourite expression of Elijah (I. Kings xvii. 1, &c.), to whose prophetic line Jonah may have belonged; but in his wilfulness and rebellion he went out from that presence."

The difference between Elijah and Jonah is this. While Elijah, in a moment of weakness and fear, ran away from his work, Jonah, in a spirit of disobedience, renounced his office as a prophet; he would not accept his commission, and threw off his prophetic mantle. Jeremiah, a man of a gentle and timid spirit, pled that he was but a child, and not fit for the terrible functions to which he was called, and he received assurances of sufficient strength for his vocation. Had Jonah pled weakness and fear, the like assurance would have been forthcoming. But he not only shrank, but disobeyed. He would be prophet no longer. He would flee from the high and responsible position of "standing before Jehovah" to receive His behests, and, having done so, the Holy Land could be his home no longer; he would go to Tarshish.

The comparison which I have thus drawn between Jonah and the prophets which immediately preceded him helps us to understand a good deal that we find in the book, and goes a good way towards answering objections. Whatever peculiarities may be found in that book, there is much in common between the histories of Elijah and Elisha, and Jonah's part in the mission ascribed to him, with the strange things that accompanied it.

3. *The Time of Jonah's Mission as it respects his own Nation.*—The nation, as we have seen, had passed through a great crisis—the crisis occasioned by the fanatical purpose of Jezebel to restore the "Canaan" which had been supplanted by "Israel." The nation had been saved from this disastrous consummation, and



the purpose of God had been saved from being made void. Moreover, a season of success in war with Syria and of internal quiet and prosperity had been granted to Israel, "according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the prophet" (II. Kings xiv. 23). It was then that Jonah, after what we may call a home ministry, which included, we cannot help believing, the teaching and warning of his own nation, as well as the fulfilment of his prophecy concerning Israel—was sent on a foreign mission. He thus became what Dean Stanley called him, "the first apostle to the Gentiles."

There were events in the ministry of Elijah and Elisha which might have taught Israel that although it was a "peculiar people," a "people near unto God" (Psalms cxlviii. 14), a people to whom He had "shown His word, His statutes, and His judgments," as they were not shown to other nations (Psalms cxlvii. 19, 20), still other nations were, as well as Israel, the subjects of His government and the objects both of His judgments and of His mercy. Our Lord referred to these in His home synagogue at Nazareth—the Sidonian widow of Sarepta and the Syrian leper, Naaman (Luke iv.)—and thereby greatly offended the intolerant and exclusive Nazarenes, worthy forerunners of those Jews who, at a later period, exclaimed, "Away with such a fellow from the earth," when Paul ventured to speak of the Gentiles as the objects of the commission which he had received from the ascended Christ (Acts xxii. 21). The lesson of the Divine government of other peoples, and of the Divine mercy toward them, was especially

seasonable at the close of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha.

The grand moral of the book is understood only in the light of the question, "Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles?" The mission of Jonah was an answer to this question. "Yes, of the Gentiles also" (Romans iii. 29).

Professor Bruce has made us familiar with the idea that in the Bible we have revelations of the Divine, and of the Divine will, in *acts* as well as in *words*, and "by acts even more characteristic than by words." The chief end of Revelation, he holds truly, was the manifestation of God as the God of grace. And "it will appear (as he says) that this the end was such as to demand Divine self-manifestation by action, not to the exclusion of words, but by action very specially—by acts of the miraculous order largely." Now this is exactly what we have in the mission of Jonah to Nineveh. It gives us, embodied in act, a revelation of the Divine purpose of mercy to the Gentile as well as to the Jew. The prophet's message was in form one of judgment because of wickedness. But underlying it, as the prophet knew, and strangely, as he feared, was forgiveness on repentance.

The universality of the Divine purpose of redemption was implied in the first announcement of it in Paradise, and it was distinctly asserted in the promise made to the father of the Jewish people in the very hour of his being called to found a nation that should be separate from other nations. It was now, by the mission of Jonah, manifested afresh in an impressive and memorable form. That the spirit of Israel continued to be narrow and exclusive is no argument



against the fact that the mission to Nineveh taught the great lesson that the God of Israel was the God of the Gentiles likewise. The more articulate and explicit teaching of Isaiah, and other prophets of later date, failed to correct this spirit, which was never more exclusive, never more contemptuous of other nations, than when prophecy had completed its ministry.

“So extraordinary an event as the mission of Jonah,” Von Orelli remarks truly, “is to be understood from the moral significance of the entire history. If Peter, in the same Joppa, needed a heavenly vision before he set foot in the first heathen house, a still stronger Divine interposition was necessary in the Old Covenant to overcome the resistance of the spirit of national self-righteousness which deemed the impure heathen fit objects of Divine wrath, but denied to them God’s mercy. What moved Jonah to run away from God’s commission was not merely the presentiment which the North Israelite might have, that from this Nineveh, unless it is destroyed, ruin threatens his own country; but in the last resort, the jealousy which would not allow that the God of Israel stands in the same relation to the heathen as to His chosen people, a foreboding, in a sense, that the heathen might take the place of the disobedient first-born son.”—*On the Minor Prophets*, p. 172. Whether Jonah apprehended all this or not, he could not mistake the teaching of his mission, that while the surrounding nations were under Divine government, and their crimes the objects of Divine judgment, they were not beyond the pale of Divine mercy.

4. *The Time of Jonah's Mission as it respects Nineveh.*—As the time of the mission of Jonah was fitting so far as Israel was concerned, it was equally so so far as Nineveh was concerned. The contrary is often assumed and asserted, but the relation of Israel to Assyria in the days of Jonah is now ascertainable beyond reasonable doubt.

According to the Biblical record there were frequent wars between Israel and *Syria*, whose capital was Damascus, not Nineveh, in the days of Ahab, while Benhadad the first and the second were the kings of Syria. Some of these were before the translation of Elijah (I. Kings xx.). After Ahab humbled himself we are told of three years of peace between Syria and Israel (I. Kings xxi. 29; xxii. 1). Then war was resumed at the instance of the King of Judah, which cost the King of Israel his life (I. Kings xxii. 37). After the interesting episode of the story of Naaman's visit to Elisha we find Syria waging war again against Israel (II. Kings ii. 8). And we are told that "in those days the Lord began to cut Israel short: and Hazael (King of Syria) smote them in all the coasts of Israel; from Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites," and others (II. Kings x. 33). So far Israel and Syria.

The argument from silence must always be used with caution. But the very minute statement which we have here of how the Lord began to cut Israel short—that is, to cut off part after part of Israelitish territory—does not seem to leave room for any action of Assyria in the matter. It was by the King of Syria—not Assyria—that part after part, from Jordan eastward, was wrested from Israel during

Jehu's reign of eight and twenty years, and the reigns of his son and grandson before the days of Jeroboam.

The first mention of an Assyrian invasion is in the reign of Menahem, who came to the throne some years after the death of Jeroboam. When we read (II. Kings xv. 19) that "Pul, the King of Assyria, came against the land, and that Menahem gave him a thousand shekels of silver that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand." "So (we are told) the King of Assyria turned back and stayed not there in the land." If this was the first Assyrian invasion of Israel, it was thirty or forty years after the death of Jeroboam. So far the Biblical record.

Happily, the now disinterred, and recently interpreted, Assyrian inscriptions throw some light on the subject. According to the tablet history of Assyria, the first Assyrian invasion of Israel was by Tiglath Pileser—who is now identified with Pul—in the reign of Menahem, in exact accordance with II. Kings xv. 19. The tablets at the same time inform us of a fact which is not mentioned in the Bible: that Jehu paid tribute—a tribute—to the Assyrian monarch, Shalmaneser, when he successfully invaded Syria and took possession of Damascus, about B.C. 842. This tribute was not annual, like the tributes of states that were vassal because conquered. It was a single payment, or bribe, to prevent the conqueror from pushing his conquests into the land of Israel. And in this it was successful. At least, as has been stated, we read of no Assyrian invasion of that land till after the reign of Jehu's great-grandson, Jeroboam.

There is another most significant fact revealed by

the Cuneiform Tablets—namely, this, that Assyria was from some cause or causes in a condition of decadence from about B.C. 784 to 745. All expert interpreters of the inscriptions are agreed on this point. One such favours me with this statement:—"With the closing years of the life of Raman-Nirari the decadence of Assyria begins, and she collapses as rapidly as she had risen. This period extends for thirty-nine years, from B.C. 784 to 745. There are, I believe, no contemporary records of this period, but the Assyrian astrological tables furnish us with the names of the kings and the chief events of each year. We find that the kings no longer command their armies in person; their expeditions were few and unfortunate; the provinces threw off their allegiance; Gozan and Namri and the towns in the immediate vicinity of Nineveh are in revolt. The sovereignty of the king is confined to the country within little more than a day's ride of his capital. Famine and earthquake aggravated the political disasters of the time; a total eclipse of the sun is specially noted. At length, in B.C. 745, the last of these *fainéant* kings is assassinated, and a new era opens for Assyria." The decadence of Assyria, my correspondent adds, was Jeroboam's opportunity. The power of Damascus had been shattered. Benhadad and Hazael—energetic monarchs—were no more. The Assyrians had retired, and an able warrior like Jeroboam was ready to gather up the spoil.

✓ This period of decadence, as it is called, in the Assyrian power, synchronising with the reign of Jeroboam, synchronises with the mission of Jonah. And in this fact—revealed to us in these last days

by contemporary Assyrian inscriptions—we have a singular proof of the verisimilitude of the story told in the Book of Jonah, a corroboration or confirmation of the first impression which the form of the book produces—that it is a history and not an allegory. An Israelite missionary to Nineveh in the time of an Assyrian invasion, or in the midst of bitter wars between Assyria and Israel, could have little prospect of being heard, if, indeed, he could hope for personal safety. The difficulty and the danger would be little less if, in the absence of actual war, the Assyrian power was at its height. Nineveh, filled with the pride of recent conquests and of the vain consciousness of strength, might say, “I am a queen and shall see no sorrow.” But before the mission of Jonah Nineveh was already seeing much sorrow, and was prepared, to say the least, to listen to the voice which summoned her to repent. And we are thus aided to understand what to many is the great mystery of the success of the prophet’s mission.



### CHAPTER III.

#### THE SELF-CONSISTENCY OF THE BOOK AND OF THE MAN.

PROFESSOR RAMSAY, in his valuable work on "The Church in the Roman Empire," says, "It is impossible for any one to invent a tale whose scene lies in a foreign land without betraying in slight details his ignorance of the scenery and circumstances amid which the event is described as taking place. Even the most laborious and minute study of the circumstances of the country in which he is to lay his scene will not preserve him from errors" in matters of detail (pp. 114, 115). Believing thus, he concludes that the account of Paul's travels in Asia Minor, in the Acts of the Apostles, is so exactly true to the country and to the circumstances of the very years in which he travelled, as now revealed by Roman history and in recently discovered local inscriptions, that he cannot account for it except on the supposition of what he calls a travel-document written by the Apostle himself, or by some one "under his influence."

We are familiar with a similar argument having reference to the Exodus story of the redemption from Egypt, and to the forty years in the Wilderness. The



Book of Jonah may be studied with a view to ascertain whether a similar argument may be drawn from it. The materials are scanty and the incidents few, but they are not without significance in our inquiry as to the historical or non-historical character of the book. Having considered Jonah in relation to his predecessors in prophecy, and his mission in relation to the times in which he lived, we may now look at the statements of the book to see what internal evidence of truth they contain, and to see how far the character of the man has the self-consistency which is presumptive evidence of reality.

The earlier part of the narrative needs no exposition to show its naturalness and its conformity to probability. The prophet, unwilling to obey "the word of the Lord," which instructed him to go to Nineveh, practically renounces his prophetic office, and resolves to go to a distant land where the Lord had no prophets, and where the voice of the Lord might not follow him.

"In this history," as Dr. Pusey says, "we follow the prophet step by step. He arose to flee to Tarshish, went down to Joppa, a perilous, yet the only seaport for Judæa. He finds the ship, *pays its fare* (one of those little touches of a true narrative), God sends the storm, man does all he can; and all in vain. The character of the heathen is brought out in contrast with the then sleeping conscience and despondency of the prophet. But it is all in act. They are all activity; he simply passive. They pray (as they can) each man to his gods; he is asleep; they do all they can, lighten the ship; the shipmaster rouses him to pray to his God, since their own prayers avail not; they propose

the lots, cast them; the lot falls on Jonah. Then follow their brief accumulated inquiries; Jonah's calm answer, increasing their fear; their inquiry of the prophet himself what they are to do to him; his knowledge that he must be cast over; the unwillingness of the heathen; one more fruitless effort to save both themselves and the prophet; the increasing violence of the storm; the prayer to the prophet's God, not to lay innocent blood to them who obeyed His prophet; the casting him forth; the instant hush and silence of the sea; their conversion and sacrifice to the true God—the whole stands before us as if we saw it with our own eyes."—*On the Minor Prophets*, p. 252.

In passing it may be remarked that it would be too much to infer from the narrative that these mariners became then and there converts to the faith of the God of Israel. Their belief that he was a true God did not exclude belief in their own gods. They believed that it was He that had raised the storm and had calmed the storm, and they were greatly awed, and made vows, vows probably that they would present other gifts and offerings when He should have brought them safe to land, nothing more.

Thus far everything in the narrative is true to what we know of the ways and superstitions, or unenlightened beliefs, of heathen mariners. The story is told with such inimitable simplicity and naturalness that one can scarcely imagine it to be a fiction, or even a tale founded on fact. If it be a parable, or part of a parable, its author must have been well acquainted with the seafaring and seafarers of the time; but it behoved him so to frame his parable that it should not be mistaken for a literal



fact. To this point I may have to return. Meantime, I do not push my argument beyond saying that the closest and most minute study of the first sixteen verses of the book not only cannot discover anything that should throw doubt on its properly historic character, but is strongly confirmatory of it. Moreover, if the book be an allegory, one scarcely sees how this earlier part of it contributes to the purpose for which the allegory is supposed to have been fashioned.

But we now come to what may be called the crux of the historic theory :—

“ Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights ” (i. 17).

Before proceeding, we shall do well to recall the manner of Hebrew thought and speech with reference to the direct and personal action of God in the world. That the Hebrews could distinguish between the natural and the supernatural I have no doubt—between, for example, the harvest that grows in the field as the fruit of man’s labour and the manna that descended in the wilderness at the immediate bidding of God. But they recognised God in the natural harvest, and in sun and rain which contribute to it, more closely and habitually than we are accustomed to do. And no philosophical or scientific misgiving stood in the way of their accepting the supernatural as historic reality. It is for us to distinguish—if we can—whether the Divine action which their books describe is in any case only natural and providential, or whether it is what we call supernatural.

In the story before us we have, I take it, both. In the great fish, and its capacity to swallow the body of a man, there was nothing supernatural. The existence of such a fish is no longer questioned. But the bringing a particular fish to the side of the ship when Jonah was cast into the sea is distinctly ascribed to Divine action. "God had prepared" or provided a fish for the service which it was now to render. It matters little by what name we describe this action. [The reader will readily recall several events in our Lord's history: Matthew xvii. 24—27; Luke v. 4; John xxi. 6.] The preservation of Jonah alive in the body of the fish, and his final deliverance from his strange prison uninjured, can scarcely be described as other than supernatural. A devout Hebrew might fitly say, and we say now, "This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." To decline faith in a miracle till we can explain its process is to decline faith in it till it shall cease to be a miracle.

Taking the incident as a whole, we regard it as a great miracle, and are prepared to maintain that, instead of involving us in any doubt of the historic truth of the book in which it is found, it is in perfect keeping with the story, and is even an essential part of it. There is nothing grotesque in it, and nothing to justify the ridicule with which unbelievers and some others ring the changes on the idea of a prophet being lodged in the belly of a fish—which at the same time they wrongly assume to have been a whale.

There is nothing puerile or frivolous, or what may be called gratuitous and useless, in the miracles of the Old Testament. They are in perfect harmony with the circumstances in which they were wrought and

the purpose which they were designed to serve; in harmony, likewise, with our highest conceptions of God—in fact, are revelations of God, even as the miracles of our Lord were revelations of His character and work, as well as credentials of His mission. Dean Stanley, writing of the “outward signs” of the “call which Moses received in the desert,” says:—“Whatever the explanation put on their precise import, there is this undoubted instruction conveyed in their description, that they are marked by their peculiar appropriateness and homogeneousness to the peculiar circumstances of the prophet, which marks all like manifestations, through every variety of form, to the prophets, the successors of Moses, in every age.” This homogeneousness to circumstances is very marked in the “signs” wrought in Egypt by Moses. They are not prodigies, such as are found in legends. They have a profound significance. The natural elements of the story are perfectly and exclusively Egyptian, and they impart a special significance to the supernatural power by which they were used and controlled, which nothing else could have given it, inasmuch as these natural elements were all, so far as we can trace them, more or less intimately connected with the idolatries of the land.

The miracles that were wrought in the days of Ahab and of Nebuchadnezzar, both of them days of great crises, were marked with the same features. They were different in form, but they revealed the same God. The worship of nature and of natural forces was demonstrated on Carmel in the days of Ahab to be false. The demoniac endeavour of Absolutism to compel all human spirits to do its will

was frustrated when the lion would not devour and the fire would not burn, in the days of Daniel. If the critic should raise a question as to the historicity of any of these things, he must confess, at least, that, whether historical or mythical, the conception of God which they embody is that which is given to us in the older story of the burning bush—God the Eternal and Unchangeable ; God the Ruler of material nature ; God the Judge and Avenger and Redeemer of the oppressed.

We argue that the miracle of which Jonah was the subject was of the same order, appropriate and homogeneous to the circumstances. Jonah had it in his creed that Jehovah, the God of the Hebrew people, was the God of heaven who had made the sea and the dry land (i. 9). But, in the unreasoning mood of a rebellious spirit, he vainly endeavoured to put the sea between him and the land which was God's own. But the very sea obeyed the "dread control" of its Maker, raged furiously at His bidding, and at the same bidding sank into a great calm. The inhabitants of the deep at the same time unconsciously obeyed the behest of their Maker, and one of them—naturally as fierce as the lions in the Babylonian den, became as tame as they were when Daniel was at their mercy—received the prophet into his body, and restored him safely to the dry land. Jonah needed all this discipline to cure him of his foolish resistance to the will of God, and to prepare him for the task from which it was proved to him that there was no escape. The strange adventure of which he was the subject was overruled to promote the success of his mission ; and who knows whether Nineveh would have listened to him

but for what our Lord calls "the sign of the prophet Jonas"?

This is our interpretation of the "great miracle" over which so many stumble; and this is how, studying it in the light of other great miracles, and of the circumstances in which it took place, we find in it not a hindrance to, but a confirmation of, our faith in the historical character of the book.

Mr. F. Denison Maurice said well in his own style many years ago:—"The words, 'The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights,' have given occasion to a series of refinements, speculations, explanations, arguments, respecting the nature and possibility of the incident which it is wearisome and humiliating to read or think of. One who considers how great and wonderful a thing a preservation from the deep is, who believes that the Lord is the author of every such preservation, who finds at the same time that he does not understand, and is not likely to understand, the method of this particular preservation, dwells on that which must at all events be the essence of the story, and leaves its accidents as he finds them. To the mere hunter for rarities and curiosities the accident is everything, the essence nothing. He pores over the whale, he forgets God."—*The Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament*, Sermon xix.

The main question being, History or Allegory? we may at this point ask what the allegorist has to say about the miracle. He must explain it somehow, for it is in the book. How does he account for it?



Passing by the connection which some find between it and certain Greek and Phœnician myths, the most accepted theory is that of which we shall have more to say in a later chapter: that of Dr. C. H. H. Wright:—"The allegory seems (he says) to have been mainly constructed from the significant passages in Jeremiah li. 34—44."—*Biblical Essays*, p. xxiii. And Dr. Driver has nothing better to offer. "According to the allegorical view (he says), the nation was 'swallowed up' by the world-power, Babylon (see especially Jeremiah li. 34), as Jonah was swallowed by the fish."—*Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 304. And he sees no objection to the use thus made of Jeremiah li. 34. Now, what do we read there?

"Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his belly with my delicacies, he hath cast me out."

The author of the allegory, passing by all the other parts of the metaphor by which Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the Jewish nation is here described, is moved, we are to assume, by the words, "He hath swallowed me up like a dragon," and constructs a parable of which the swallowing of a prophet by a great fish shall be the centrepiece. His genius is fertile, and, without any help from the prophetic words of Jeremiah, he invents a deeply interesting story of the flight from duty of a prophet whom, without any foundation in fact, he identifies with Jonah—inventing the particulars which we find in the book respecting the storm and the heathen sailors. Further

moved by his inventive faculty, he constructs the further story of a reluctant mission to Nineveh, of a prophecy of speedy destruction, and of the repentance of the people of that great city, all out of his own brain. And thus he became the prototype of John Bunyan; only John Bunyan's work bore on the face of it that it was an allegory; and the work of the Hebrew allegorist was made to bear on the face of it that it was a history, so much so that it required nearly two millenniums and a half to lift the veil and disclose its true character.

The forty-fourth verse of the fifty-first of Jeremiah could have given the allegorist but little help in the origination of his work :—

“I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not flow together any more unto him.”

In the former verse it is the king that has “swallowed”; and he hath “swallowed” both the nations and the nations’ “delicacies,” the corn and wine and oil of Palestine, and all the precious things which were carried to Babylon; in the later verse it is Bel, the chief god of the Babylonians, that is described as having “swallowed” something; and when it is said that Bel should have to disgorge what he had swallowed, we think at once, not of a person, but of the vessels of the temple of Jehovah that had been placed in his temple (see Ezra i. 7; Daniel v. 2). In verse 34 there is the addition, “like a dragon.” A dragon is with us a fabulous animal, but the original word probably means a sea-monster (Isaiah xxvii. 1;

li. 9; Ezekiel xxix. 3). And the sole foundation for the allegory, and its sole initiating suggestion, is in the words, "He hath swallowed me up like a sea-monster." I have read somewhere of "pyramids of scientific results" being poised on very small points. Could we have a better example than we have here?

If we must find a connection between the Book of Jonah and the figurative language of Jeremiah, should we be unreasonable if we argued that the metaphor of the prophet was based on the incident in the book, and not that the incident was based on the metaphor? But the metaphor is of too common a kind to render it needful for us to go in search of anything special to account for it. Jeremiah, though his own country was "inland," was familiar with the neighbouring "great sea," and with what was known or believed respecting it. His predecessor, Isaiah, writing of Egypt, spoke of the dragon that was in the *sea* (xxvii. 1). His successor, Ezekiel, writing of the King of Egypt, referred to "the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his *rivers*" (xxix. 3). Nothing could be more natural than that Jeremiah, adding figure to figure to describe the destruction of his nation by the King of Babylon, should say, "He hath swallowed us up like a dragon." But nothing could be less natural than that this very common figure of speech should have been the foundation, and, in fact, the occasion, of the whole story in the Book of Jonah.

We now come to the so-called Psalm of Jonah. Is it consistent with the place which it occupies in the book as a history? Does it add to or detract from the verisimilitude of the book as historical?



Dr. Cheyne holds that this psalm or poem does not belong to the original book, but was probably added to it by some other than the author of the book "subsequently to 198 B.C.," paying no heed to the fact that the book had by that time been in the Canon more than two centuries; the tampering with it and the falsifying of it by the insertion of the psalm, and thus materially changing its character in the face of a people who had so long guarded it as a holy thing, resting on no authority but the critic's imagination.

Dr. Driver's view does not differ very widely from Dr. Cheyne's: "The psalm is not strictly appropriate to Jonah's situation at the time; for it is not a petition for deliverance to come [in passing, I remark it does not profess to be], but a thanksgiving for deliverance already accomplished. Hence, probably, the Book of Jonah was not its original place, but it was taken by the author from some prior source." According to this, the author of the book was not the author of the psalm, but finding it somewhere else, he put it where we find it now. Doctor Samuel Davidson thinks the psalm has all the characteristics of having been put into the mouth of Jonah by some poet after him. —*Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 939.

These are opinions, and opinions only; but they are the opinions of learned men whose voices are potent in the critical world. Many more might be quoted as samples of the varieties or contrarieties of conclusions that are arrived at when the test of judgment is mainly subjective. They are the opinions of men who are loath to admit that Jonah is a true and simple history. But they contribute nothing to the support of the theory of an inspired allegory. A skilful

allegorist, to say nothing of inspiration, has his materials under his plastic hand, and can mould them at his pleasure. He can put words into his hero's mouth that shall be perfectly germane to his purpose, and to his own idea of his aim in the allegory. But the psalm now in our hands is so far from being thus germane that, according to these critics, it has no vital or natural connection with the allegory, which was complete without it and will suffer no damage by its omission. It is an independent entity, of doubtful authorship, and when and by whom it found its place where it is no one knows.

Dr. Wright differs from both Doctors Cheyne and Driver, and regards the psalm as belonging to the original book, and of one authorship with it. But in this, again, we have little more than another *opinion*. "Jonah's hymn (he says) fits in admirably into an allegory of which the exile of Israel is the theme. It is not such a hymn as could have been naturally composed under the circumstances narrated in the book, if those circumstances are regarded as literal facts. Nor is it such a hymn as one would have expected a man rescued from the stomach of an actual sea-monster to have composed as a memorial of his deliverance" (pp. 61, 62). This is little more than mere subjective opinion, which might be met with the mere opinion of any other man.

There is one argument, however, which deserves notice, for we meet with it in various forms. "It is worthy of notice (Dr. Wright says) that not a single note of repentance is struck in the hymn from first to last. It contains no lamentation for sin, though it is replete with the voice of thanksgiving for deliverance.

The only sin alluded to in the psalm is the sin of idolatry, alluded to in verse 8, which sin was not committed by Jonah, but by the Gentiles who knew not the God of Israel."—*Essays*, p. 61.

What if here we find an argument stronger against the allegorical than against the historical theory? We may wonder that Jonah should not have confessed his sin. But we wonder still more that the allegorist should not have confessed the sin of his nation. It is the nation, *ex hypothesi*, that is symbolised by Jonah, according to Dr. Wright, who regards this idea as the very key to the meaning of the book. Now, "the nation (to use his own words) was deaf to the call of God, deaf to the appeals of His prophets, and so blind that it did not behold the real glory of its position." More than this. It was not the Gentiles alone that had "observed lying vanities" and "forsaken their own mercy" (verse 8 of the psalm). The very nation of Israel had done so again and again. "They followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them." God's prophets remonstrated, but Israel persevered, oftentimes in the very worst forms and practices of idolatry, "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight" (II. Kings xvii. 15—18). There was provision made in the ancient law for forgiveness and the restoration of the Divine favour—it was on confession of sin and repentance. (See Levit. xxvi., Deut. iv. 29, and Solomon's prayer, I. Kings viii. 46, &c.) The prophet Hosea, for some time at least the contemporary of the real Jonah, addresses his people in these

tender and persuasive words: "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and return to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy" (xiv. 1—3).

But of all this we have not a hint or suggestion in the allegorist's psalm. He is setting forth, we are told, the reluctance of Israel, "the servant of Jehovah, to fulfil its mission in the world, and its unfaithfulness to its high calling." But there is not one word to indicate any consciousness of sin. "It is replete with the voice of thanksgiving for deliverance," but no acknowledgment of the age-long wrong-doing which had been the occasion of calamity.

As to the absence of any confession of sin on the part of Jonah, it may, perhaps, be accounted for by the fact, which is too apparent, that, though constrained to go to Nineveh, his spirit was still rebellious against the work to which he was called. The mercy of God to the Ninevites seemed to him a justification of his flight to Tarshish (iv. 1—3). His hymn was the utterance of his own heart. But if it was the composition of an inspired allegorist representing the nation, the absence of what may be called the first thing needful, the confession of sin, must for ever remain unexplained.

The key on which the allegorist should have pitched his psalm, he could, and would, have found in Jeremiah's "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning

himself thus," as in chap. xxxi. 18, 19; or in Daniel's prayer, "We have sinned and have committed iniquity," as in chap. ix. But we have none of this. The allegorist's heart was at fault, or his hand had lost its cunning.

My argument does not need that I should expound Jonah's hymn of thanksgiving, but it will be confirmed by some part of Dr. Pusey's comment:—"Altogether, Jonah's thanksgiving is that of one whose mind was stored with the Psalms which were part of the public worship; but it is the language of one who uses and re-casts them freely. No one verse is taken entirely from any psalm. There are original expressions everywhere. The words, 'I went down to the cuttings-off of the mountains,' 'the sea-weed bound around my head,' 'the earth, its bars around me for ever' vividly exhibit him sinking, entangled, imprisoned, as it seems, inextricably; he goes on; we should expect some further description of his state; but he adds, in five simple words, *Thou broughtest up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.* Words somewhat like these last occur elsewhere, *Thou hast brought up my soul from hell*, agreeing in the one word, 'brought up.' But the majesty of the prophet's conception is in the connection of the thought; the sea-weed was bound round his head as his grave-clothes; the solid bars of the deep-rooted earth were around him, *and*—God brought him up. At the close of the thanksgiving, *Salvation is the Lord's*, the deliverance is completed, as though God had only waited for this act of complete faith.

"So could no one have written, who had not himself

been delivered from such an extreme peril of drowning, as man could not, of himself, escape from. True, that no image so well expresses the overwhelmedness under affliction or temptation, as the pressure of storm by land, or being overflowed by the waves of the sea. 'Human poetry knows of a sea of troubles,' or 'waves of evils.' What in it is most descriptive of Jonah's situation, as 'binding of the sea-weed around the head, the sinking down to the roots of the mountains, the bars of the earth around him,' are peculiar to this thanksgiving of Jonah; they do not occur elsewhere, for, except through miracle, they would be images not of peril but of death."—*On the Minor Prophets*, pp. 252, 253.

As to the composition of the Psalm, "we are not to imagine (says Principal Douglas) that the prayer was composed at some particular moment, but rather that it is the sum of the thoughts and feelings of his mind, when he knew that the worst was now over in that wondrous condition of existence. The written form of it is, no doubt, to be dated from a time after his return to the world, just as a poet may leisurely write down a piece which he had virtually composed at an earlier time, in circumstances when he did not or could not write."

We come now to Jonah's journey to Nineveh, which was not so difficult an adventure as some may imagine. It was not over a *terra incognita* such as that by which Livingstone traversed the Dark Continent from the Indian to the Atlantic Ocean. The Tel-el-Amarna tablets, lately discovered in Middle Egypt, contain letters that had passed between the King of Egypt



and the King of Babylon long before the days of Jonah. And we learn from them that there were two routes from Egypt to the Euphrates, one of which had been traversed by an Egyptian king in a great series of campaigns two centuries before the Exodus. This route led along the sea-shore of Palestine by Gaza to Carmel, then struck by Megiddo across the plain of Galilee and the upper springs of the Jordan to Cœlo-Syria, and thence by Carchémish to the Euphrates. The other route from Egypt kept along the coast of Carmel and Megiddo, and then through Phœnicia across the spurs of the Libanus to the Dog River and Beiruet, then turning inland eastward to the Euphrates.

Jonah—who was cast ashore somewhere on the coast from which he had embarked, for the ship was not far from its harbour when it was overtaken by the storm—could follow either of these routes to his destination at Nineveh. As to the absence of any details of the journey, something will be said farther on. Meantime, this may be said, that a detailed itinerary of stations and adventures would not add to our confidence in the historic truth of the book; for they are not necessary for its grand, Divine purpose, and would possess only a human interest, serving no higher purpose than the gratification of a human curiosity.

What happened at Nineveh I reserve for a separate chapter, with the consideration of the success which is said to have attended Jonah's mission. The narrative of the book concludes with the story of the gourd which sheltered the prophet. This brings us once more into the region of the natural *and* the supernatural.

The gourd was, such is the general belief, the Ricinus, or Palma-Christ, of which Dr. Thomson writes in *The Land and the Book*. "It is very commonly used for trailing over temporary arbours. It grows with extraordinary rapidity. In a few days after it has fairly begun to *run*, the whole arbour is covered. It forms a shade absolutely impenetrable to the sun's rays, even at noon-day. It flourishes best in the very hottest part of summer; and, lastly, when injured or cut it withers away with equal rapidity."

The statement of the book is that "the Lord prepared a gourd and made it to come up over Jonah." It will not escape notice that this is the style in which the act of God is described in the beginning of the book: "The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea," and "the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." We have now, as before, a union of the natural and the supernatural. The ricinus, with its rapid growth and thick foliage, was the most fitting means for over-shadowing the prophet. But if the words, "which came up in a night," are to be interpreted literally, the rapidity of its growth was more than natural. They imply that "God gave to a tree or plant which had been previously produced such an extraordinary accelerated power of germination that the leaves, which would otherwise have required some longer time to come to maturity, were brought to perfection in the course of a night." And we are thus reminded of the hymn-lines descriptive of our Lord's miracle in feeding thousands with a few loaves:—

"'Twas spring-time when He blest the bread,  
And harvest when He brake."

Accepting the book as a history, this ending of it is



in perfect keeping with all that has gone before. From first to last the narrative is consistent with itself, in all that it ascribes to God and in all that it ascribes to man, and in the way in which nature and supernature worked together towards the effecting of the mission with which it says Jonah was entrusted.

But if instead of a history we have only an allegory, what is meant by the gourd or ricinus? Putting the answer very briefly, the gourd, we are told, was symbolic of Zerubbabel. "As their forefathers in the days of Zedekiah hoped that the day of calamity was over when that prince was placed on the throne of Judah, and said among themselves, 'Under his shadow we shall live among the nations' (Lam. iv. 20), so the restored exiles imagined that now at length the day of blessing had begun to dawn upon them, and that the morning of the day had come whose sun was not to go down in darkness." But "the Palm-Christ on which the Jews had fixed their hopes, and which for a time had shadowed and sheltered them, was—destroyed. Zerubbabel soon passed away. The Palm-Christ perished, as it were, in a night. The worm did the work of destruction. The governor of the royal house of David was not permitted by Divine providence to sit on David's throne." — *Wright's Essays*, pp. 86—89.

Dr. Wright assumes that the Book of Jonah was written "after the governorship of Zerubbabel." If so, the ricinus, as he explains it, could not be prophetic of the future. But yet, as Zerubbabel gave but very brief protection and comfort to the nation, the interpreter of the allegory directs attention to the great

anti-type, Jesus Christ. Why then did the allegorist stop short with the brief shadow of the gourd? Why not tell of the shadow of a great rock which neither worm nor wind could destroy?

The fact is that the date assigned to the book and the symbolic interpretation of the ricinus are made to suit each other. They are both arbitrary and groundless.

As to the character of Jonah, as well as in other respects, the book is consistent with itself. Can we be far wrong in supposing that a writer, creating the character imaginatively, would have made him a changed man after all the vicissitudes and discipline of his life? But the book leaves him unchanged. He is consistent, sinfully consistent, with himself. Improbable as his perverseness may seem, it is still more improbable if it be the work of an allegorist. As a matter of history, it is the less to be wondered at in the light of the strange and unwonted mission to which he was called; and, as has been shown already, in the light of the cowardice and faithlessness of the heroic Elijah himself in circumstances far less formidable than those which attended a mission to Nineveh. "If we turn (says Mr. Maurice) from the outside of the story to its inward characteristics, we shall find, I believe, a moral coherency and truth in it which will make us inclined to think that its figurative worth cannot be separated from its worth as a document concerning one of our own flesh and blood. Jonah is, in fact, more completely the combination of the individual with the prophet than one finds anywhere else." The true solution of the improbabilities,

real and imaginary, of the Book of Jonah is to be found—where the solution of the wonders in the stories of Moses and Elijah is to be found—in the acknowledgment of the hand of God, and in a true understanding of the “divers manners” in which God dealt with men of old by His servants, who, though prophets, were still men—men of like passions with others of their race.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE RESULT OF JONAH'S MISSION IN ITS BEARING ON THE HISTORICITY OF THE NARRATIVE.

I N the third chapter of the book we read thus:—

“Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.”

This general statement is further explained thus:—

“*For* word came unto the King of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?”

“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way.” But this result is regarded by some as throwing suspicion on the whole story.

“The greatest of the improbabilities” (in the Book of Jonah), says Professor Cheyne, “is a moral one. Can we conceive of a large heathen city being converted by an obscure foreign prophet?” “The sudden conversion on such a large scale as is evidently implied,” says Canon Driver, “of a large heathen population, is contrary to analogy. It is remarkable also that the conversion of Nineveh, if it took place upon the scale described, should have produced so little permanent effect, for the Assyrians are uniformly represented in the Old Testament as idolaters.”

Dr. Pusey (*On the Minor Prophets*) agrees with these, and with the general opinion as to the result ascribed in the book to the preaching of Jonah. He speaks of the “great moral miracle of the conversion of a whole heathen city at the voice of a single unknown prophet.” But he sees no difficulty; he magnifies the grace of God in it. “Before this stupendous power of God’s grace over the unruly will of savage, yet educated, men, the physical miracles, great as they are, shrink into nothing.”

But is it true that we find in the words of the book, or in the words of Christ, that there was in Nineveh what Dr. Pusey describes as “a conversion unexampled in the whole revelation of God to man, greater in its immediate effects than the miracle of the Day of Pentecost”?

Judaism, be it remembered, made no provision for missions to the heathen. Its institutions were con-

servative, not aggressive. Conservative, but not exclusive.

If the nation of Israel had been true to its vocation, its light, shining in the very heart of a dark world, would have drawn out of the surrounding darkness many, like the Ethiopian of a later age, to seek the living and the true God. And these would find that the house of the Lord in Jerusalem was "a house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah lvi. 3—7). But neither priest nor prophet was sent forth, as the apostles of Christ were, to "teach all nations." To neither was commission given to go into Egypt or Assyria, or the isles of the sea, to make known the claims of the Maker and Ruler of all. The prophets had visions of glorious times, when the knowledge of the Lord should cover the whole earth, and the Gentiles should cast away their idols. But there was not laid on them the duty of going forth to effect this grand consummation.

All this has to be kept in view if we would rightly interpret the mission of Jonah to Nineveh. The prophet's "cry" was not, "Jehovah is the one living and true God, and I am His prophet." The word of the Lord God said to him, "Go to Nineveh, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me" (an expression which reminds us of the words of the Lord to Abraham, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great; their sin is very grievous"). "Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." True; idolatry was wickedness before God. But the preaching of the exclusive Deity of the God of the Hebrew nation, at least as the foremost theme of the prophet's "cry," would excite national antipathies, and might seem to

be dictated only by the proud spirit of a rival people. But the denouncement of the notorious and practical wickedness of the people—rulers and people alike—could find its way to their heart and conscience.

The message of Jonah resembles that of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel did not say, "O king, turn from Bel and Merodach, gods that are no gods, to Jehovah the Living and the True"; but, "O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity" (Daniel iv. 27). At the end of twelve months, Nebuchadnezzar, in defiance of the warning of his dream and the counsel of his faithful servant Daniel, walked proudly in his palace, and said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" The same hour was the threatened judgment fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar, and "he was driven from among men." But "the people of Nineveh believed God," and hastened to turn from their evil way. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way." Such is the averment of the book, and such is Christ's representation of it.

The king, moved apparently by the impression produced on the people by the preaching of Jonah (comp. vers. 5 and 6 of chap. iii.), issued a proclamation, in which he spoke of "crying mightily unto God," and of "God turning from His fierce anger." By "God" he no doubt meant the God in whose name the prophet preached the coming destruction of the city. But it does not follow from this that he



accepted, or even understood, the doctrine of the exclusive Deity of the God of the Hebrew people. Nebuchadnezzar, on having his dream disclosed and interpreted by Daniel, said to Daniel, "Of a truth it is that your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings, and a Revealer of secrets" (Dan. ii. 47, R.V.). But, notwithstanding this "confession of faith," he made a great image of gold, and commanded all peoples and nations of his great empire to worship it, and cast those who would not into a burning fiery furnace. On his recovery, after this, from a bestial condition, the King of Babylon said, "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (Dan. iv. 37). But from this we cannot infer that henceforward Bel and Merodach were an "abomination" to him as they were to true Hebrews; and that he rendered heart-service to Him of whom he said, "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion from generation to generation" (Dan. iv. 3). He left the gold and silver vessels which he had taken out of the temple at Jerusalem, in the hands of successors who, in their mad revelry, drank wine out of them, and, in defiance of the "high God" to whom they had been consecrated, "praised the gods of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of iron" (Dan. v. 1—4). If we judged of Cyrus by the words of the decree in which he gave liberty to the Jewish exiles, we should call him an enlightened monotheist: "The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem" (Ezra i. 2). It has been com-

monly supposed that Cyrus was a monotheist, being a Persian, and presumably a follower of the Zoroastrian faith. But if the newly discovered inscriptions are to be trusted, he "worshipped Bel-Merodach and Nebo, and paid public homage to the deities of Babylon." Hiram, King of Tyre, congratulating Solomon on his accession to the throne of David, and on his purpose to build a temple for his God, spoke of Solomon's God as "the Lord God of Israel, who made heaven and earth." But there is no reason to suppose that he forsook the gods of Phœnicia or ceased to worship in their temples.

All this seems strange to us, with our ideas of the exclusive prerogatives of Jehovah, whom we worship as the only living and true God, and who will not give His glory to another. But the analogy of what we find in the histories to which I refer, justifies the conclusion that there is nothing in what we are told of the Ninevites and their king to indicate that the preaching of Jonah turned them from dumb idols to serve the living God.

The analogy of Old Testament history carries us farther, and enables us to understand the recorded results of the preaching of Jonah. The history of Israel and Judah presents us with a strange alternation of good kings and bad kings; the good followed by at least a partial abandonment of idolatry; and the bad, by a return to evils against which prophets preached without ceasing. The reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah illustrate more than one feature of the story of Nineveh. Hezekiah was the son of a king who had made at least one of his sons to "pass through the fire according to the abominations of the

heathen" (II. Chron. xxviii. 3); but he set his face against these abominations, and brought his nation back, more nearly than it had been for a long time, to its earliest best—the Prophet Isaiah being at his right hand to counsel and help him. But the good which he wrought was undone by a son who is regarded as the very type of a wicked man and king, and of whom it is said that he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and that he "seduced his people to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel." Manasseh is succeeded by a son like himself; but his grandson, Josiah, restores the nation once more to the worship of Jehovah. The land was cleansed of its idols, and of the wickedness which accompanied idol worship. And of Josiah it is said that "like unto him was there no king before him"; and, alas! it is added that "neither after him arose there any like unto him."

In the light of this history there is nothing to cause surprise in the story of Nineveh. The *people* were moved by the preaching of Jonah; and it was on their report that the king issued his decree, so that the decree is described as the people's (ver. 5) as well as the king's (ver. 6). In the case of the Jews the kings, good and bad, took the initiative, and the people followed suit. But we are not to suppose that in either case they did it with one accord. On the apostasy of the nation to idolatry at the instance of a king—"seduced" by his example or overborne by his authority—the story of the seven thousand who, unknown to Elijah, had not bowed the knee to Baal, suggests the probability, we may say the certainty,

that in later times also there was a remnant, good or bad, which did not follow the multitude. The royal apostate could not coerce the conscience of those whose hearts were true to the God of Abraham. The royal reformer could not constrain the hearts of those who were wedded to idols. In either case the change, from the evil to the good, or from the good to the evil, might be so general as to be called national, especially when sanctioned or enforced by royal authority; but out of sight there would still remain what power from without could not change. If it was thus when the city of Nineveh repented and turned from wicked ways, it had been so in Israel again and again.

It is now generally confessed that the mere suddenness of the excitement produced by the preaching of Jonah affords no presumption against the truth of the story. "If the story were mentioned only in the Old Testament," says Dr. C. H. H. Wright, "it would be quite appropriate to quote as parallels to the consternation caused in Nineveh by the preaching of Jonah such incidents as the alarm created in Jerusalem by the piercing cry of Jesus the son of Anan, or the terror once occasioned at Constantinople by the prediction of a soldier that the city was to perish by a fire from heaven; or even to adduce the statement of Layard, that he has known a Christian priest frighten a whole Mussulman town to repentance by a proclamation that he had a Divine mission to announce a coming earthquake or plague. Such cases are sufficient to prove the possibility of the king and people of Nineveh being alarmed by the spectacle of an 'unknown Hebrew in a prophet's austere and

homely attire passing through the splendid streets of the proudest town of the Eastern world, uttering words of rebuke and menace.'—*Biblical Essays*, p. 68.

But what we have to account for, both according to the Book of Jonah, and to the words of Christ, is not mere excitement and consternation, but repentance and a turning from evil ways. And in order to do this, we have to look carefully at the character in which Jonah visited the city, and at the condition of the city at the time.

We are apt to think of Jonah as a poor unknown stranger, traversing the streets of the city, and crying aloud at every corner, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed!" The crowd gather around him, we imagine, and threaten to tear him to pieces as either an enemy or a fanatic. But the preaching of Jonah was not a mere wild monotone, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed!" There need be no lack of variety in preaching the preaching with which he was entrusted. He could find a fresh text in every street and thoroughfare. Before the palaces of nobles, in the market-places, in the gardens of pleasure, in the ear of the luxurious wealthy, and in the ear of the toiling multitude, he could pour out his denunciations of a wickedness which knew no shame and which knew no bounds. If the Ninevites had no Decalogue to which he could appeal, they had that conscience which took its place in large measure, and which, when awakened and enlightened, recognises the voice of God (Rom. ii. 14, 15).

If it should still seem improbable that the people of Nineveh should listen to an unknown stranger, we

have a key to it in the fact, certified by the highest authority, that his strange adventure, his entombment in the body of a great fish, and his deliverance from that prison was known to the people. Nothing less than this is implied in the words of our Lord, that Jonah was a *sign* unto the men of Nineveh: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish's belly, so shall the Son of man be . . . in the earth" (Matt. xii. 40). God overruled the disobedience of the prophet for the furtherance of his mission, and turned the events which befell him into his credentials as a man sent from God — and the news may have reached Nineveh before himself. Even to this day, the rapidity with which news travels from city to city, and from bazaar to bazaar, in Eastern lands is remarked with wonder. We do not know where Jonah was cast on the dry land, but it was somewhere on the coast from which he had embarked. And from that coast there were traders and travellers, eastward as well as westward, who would eagerly report, wherever they went, a story which, if they did not understand its significance, would at least excite universal wonderment, and be the subject of universal wondering gossip. The very superstition of the Ninevites would render it the easier for them to credit the tale. Jonah stood among them as a man raised from the dead. His voice was as a voice from the other world, and many a Felix may have trembled when he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and speedy judgment. The king was told of the foreign apparition which was moving the hearts and consciences, and awakening the fears, of the people. And unless he was a very fool, he would make inquiry



into the matter before proclaiming a universal fast. And if he did, there would be placed before him what our Lord calls "the sign of the Prophet Jonas." And that sign, acting upon and co-operating with his conscience and his people's consciences, produced the memorable result which our Lord contrasted with the unbelief of the people to whom He Himself ministered.

More than this, the time of Jonah's visit to Nineveh, as now revealed by the newly discovered inscriptions, was singularly opportune. In chapter ii., it has been shown that from about B.C. 784 to 745, almost exactly the period of the reign of Jeroboam II., B.C. 790—749 (Revised Chronology in the Cambridge Companion to the Bible), Assyria was, from some cause or other, in a condition of decadence. Thus, before the mission of Jonah, as already remarked, Nineveh was already seeing much sorrow, and was prepared, to say the least, to listen to the voice of the prophet, which summoned her to turn from her evil ways. The first thought of heathen men and nations in the time of disaster is that the gods are angry with them; and their first impulse is to do something after the manner of the King of Moab, who, when worsted in battle, took his eldest son, the heir to his throne, and offered him in sacrifice (II. Kings iii. 26, 27). Nearly two hundred years after the days of Jonah, Nineveh was in a peril from which there was no deliverance. The city was surrounded by the armies of the Medes and the Babylonians. And a fragmentary inscription, recently discovered, informs us that the King of Assyria issued a decree, in which he ordained a fast of one hundred days as the only hope of safety. It is translated by Professor Sayce, and begins, "O



Sun-god, great lord, I have asked thee: O god of fixed destiny, remove our sin." The fast is dedicated to the sun-god, in the belief or fear that some sin against him is the occasion of the ruin which now impends. But this decree contains nothing in the spirit of that which followed the preaching of Jonah, in which the king called on his subjects to "turn every man from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands." Such a way of escape was the very last that would occur to heathen Ninevites. But it was the Divine way, and the people who believed in the word of Jonah were moved to take it.

The analogy of the history of Israel throws light on the conclusion of the preaching of Jonah: "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that He said He would do unto them; and He did it not." There is no lesson enforced with greater emphasis, even in the Old Testament, than this—that God requires the service of the heart. The most gorgeous ritual which wealth and imagination can create is abomination to God without the pure heart and the clean hand (Isa. i. 10—15). But Biblical history informs us, at the same time, that in His government of men and nations it pleased God to withdraw or defer threatened judgment, when men or nations so far humbled themselves as to confess their wickedness and to depart from it, even when there were no signs of anything like a true spiritual change. The case of Rehoboam furnishes us with a significant example: "He forsook the Law of the Lord, and all Israel with him" (II. Chron. xii. 1). And a prophet was sent to say to the king and princes of Judah, "Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken

Me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak," the King of Egypt, who had come up with a mighty army against Jerusalem, and was about to take it. "Whereupon," we are told, "the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The Lord is righteous. And when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah [the prophet], saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance." It is further stated that "when he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him, that He would not destroy him altogether; and also in Judah things went well" (ver. 12). Notwithstanding this humbling and the deliverance which it brought him, the final verdict which the book pronounces on Rehoboam is, "He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord."

We have another illustration of the same point in the case of Ahab. "The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before Me? because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house" (I. Kings xxi. 28, 29).

With these and similar Scriptures before us, we need ask no question as to the superficiality or otherwise, the permanence or otherwise, of the repentance of the people of Nineveh. If it was not a heart-repentance of the entire nation, it may have been a heart-repentance of many, with a general abandonment of flagrant wickedness by the city at large. If there was no permanent change, no permanent conversion

from idols and their abominations to the holy service of Jehovah, Assyria was in this only what Israel had been again and again, both before and after the days of Jonah. But making all possible deductions, and interpreting the fruits of Jonah's mission in the light of Old Testament history, there was an impression, and there were effects, produced by the prophet's preaching which give point to our Lord's words, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here."

With our understanding of the issue of the mission of Jonah to Nineveh, the "moral improbability" over which some critics stumble has no existence. Our faith in the historic reality of the story is not staggered, but confirmed.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST IN REGARD TO FACTS IN THE BOOK OF JONAH.

WITH those who deny the authority of Christ as a "Teacher sent from God," my present argument has nothing to do. Assuming that authority, I have only to ascertain what in the Book of Jonah is covered by it. Before doing so, however, the question of the possible limitations of the knowledge of Christ in His condition on earth must be referred to, although briefly.

Bishop Colenso, rejecting any appeal to Christ with regard to the Pentateuch, asked, "At what period of Christ's life upon earth is it to be supposed that He had granted to Him, as the Son of Man, supernaturally, full and accurate information, so that He should be expected to speak about the Pentateuch in other terms than any other devout Jew of that day would have employed? Why should it be thought that He would speak with certain Divine knowledge on this matter more than upon other matters of ordinary science and history?" This is all that the Bishop had to say in defence of his position that the Son of God might be mistaken with reference to the authorship of the Pentateuch.

But his whole argument misses its mark. Grant that the Child Jesus grew in knowledge and wisdom, growth and limitation are very different from error; they need expansion, not correction, and the question is not *when* did Christ attain to perfect knowledge, but *did He ever* attain to it? We have no record of any words uttered by Him before His entrance on His public ministry, except the one saying, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" (or in My Father's house?—R.V.) Thus early did Jesus use language which approached very nearly to that which was regarded at a later period as involving a charge of equality with God (John v. 17, 18). Whatever may have been His progress in knowledge before His entrance on His public ministry, the broad fact remains that at His baptism He received a double attestation of His claims to be heard as a "Teacher sent from God," the visible descent of the symbol of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of all Divine light, and the audible voice which declared Him to be the Son of God. Now it was only then that He began to teach. And from that hour surely His words are entitled to be regarded as Divine oracles. His forerunner said of Him, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him" (John iii. 34). The words seem almost framed to answer the question, "At what period of Christ's life was there granted to Him supernaturally full and accurate information respecting the Pentateuch," or anything else?

According to the Baptist, from the very commencement of His public ministry there was no limit to His possession and enjoyment of the Holy Spirit, and the words which He spoke were consequently

the words of God. Jesus Christ Himself, acting under this impression, said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt. xxiv. 35).

The question of the limitations which were, or may have been, involved in the Incarnation of the Son of God is based to-day and mainly on the words of the Apostle in the Epistle to the Philippians:—"Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize (or a thing to be grasped) to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant" (R.V. chapter ii. 6, 7).<sup>\*</sup> Any attempt to discuss the meaning of this most important, but, in some of its parts, most difficult Scripture, would be out of place here. But I cannot accept an interpretation of Christ's condition on earth which practically amounts to this—that, although God was in Him, we must judge of His thinking by the limitations of humanity. The latest utterance on the subject I have seen is that of Professor König, of Rostock, reported in *The Thinker* (Jan., 1894, p. 70), as follows:—"Dr. König, appealing to the Kenosis (Philippians ii. 6—9) argues at length that the facts of Christ's life and the statements of the Gospels can only be explained by supposing that the pre-incarnate Son, in becoming incarnate, renounced His Divine mode of existence, including the possession of Divine knowledge, referring to the case of a man sometimes being deprived by some affliction of the use of his faculties and then gradually recovering

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<sup>\*</sup> See Bishop Lightfoot's Commentary on Philippians, and Dr. A. B. Bruce's work on the "Humiliation of Christ."

them." How a devout Christian could write thus I cannot understand—the Divinity in Christ asleep ! or in a trance ! or in a condition of unconsciousness, such as that to which a man may be reduced by some form of disease ! Better, surely, to bow before the great mystery of the union of the Divine and the human in the person of Jesus Christ, and to confess that there are questions arising out of it which we cannot answer. From speculation on the subject, let us turn aside to seek practical light in the recorded sayings of Christ and in the facts of His history, which, as I read them, cannot be reconciled with any such idea of the Man Jesus as is set forth by some able writers of to-day.

But before considering the force of Christ's words in relation to Jonah, let me quote from a critic with whom it is not often my happiness to agree, Professor Cheyne : " If you believe in the true, though ' veiled,' Divinity of Jesus Christ, and humbly accept His decrees on all points essentially connected with His Messiahship, you will feel loyally anxious to interpret the Old Testament as He, beyond question, interpreted it. You will believe His words when He says (and I attach no special importance to the accuracy of this particular report of His words, for the idea of it pervades all the four Gospels), ' The Scriptures are they which testify of me.' You will reply to non-Christian critics : In spite of modern criticism and exegesis, there must be some sense in which the words of my Lord are true. He cannot have mistaken the meaning of His own Bible, the book on which, in His youth and early manhood, He nourished His spiritual life. He who received not the Spirit by measure



cannot have been fundamentally mistaken in the Messianic psalms and prophecies." \*

Now, Christ's words with reference to Jonah do relate to a "point essentially connected with His Messiahship," His death and resurrection. And in the use which He made of it, "*He cannot*," to use Dr. Cheyne's words, "*have mistaken the meaning of His own Bible*." These words contain my whole contention. In Matthew xii. 38—41, we read that certain Scribes and Pharisees said to Christ, "Master, we would see a sign from Thee." To understand our Lord's reply, we should remember both that He gave signs and that He refused to give signs. He was Himself the greatest sign of all, the greatest miracle of all history. But the miracle of the Incarnation was "veiled," and the people saw it not. Claiming to be the Messiah, He gave outward and visible "signs," from first to last of His ministry, that He was indeed "the sent of God" (Luke vii. 18—23). Describing the miracle at Cana in Galilee, the Apostle John says, "This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory" (ii. 11, R.V.). And, after the recital of many mighty works and of much else, the Apostle says, "Many other signs did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (chapter xx. 30, 31). There were, however, who demanded what they called "signs from heaven," some, it may be, honestly; others (Matthew xvi. 1) tempting Him as Satan had done in the wilderness.

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\* *On Isaiah*. Third Edition. Vol. ii., p. 195.

Nothing but prodigies that should dazzle and confound the eyes and ears of the multitude would satisfy the spirit of what Godet calls "magic supernaturalism" by which they were filled. Such signs He would not give. If given they would not contribute to a true faith, where more rational signs, and a teaching which heart and conscience should have recognised as Divine had failed.

A sign, however, of another kind should be given when His days of public ministry were ended. A sign involving a humiliation which the people could not associate with the idea of Messiahship; He should die and be buried: but which should involve likewise, as He often announced, the transcendant glory of resurrection from the dead. Of these events, now near at hand, He found, if not a type, at least an illustration and analogy, in the history of the Prophet Jonah. The book which bears the name of the prophet was in His hands and in the hands of the people. They were all familiar with its story, and with two facts which it alleged, and which He now mentioned in their ears: (1) "Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish's body"; and (2) "The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah" (Matt. xii. 40—41). These two facts go together. It has indeed been argued that while the repentance of the Ninevites must be regarded as historical on the authority of Christ, He may have quoted the reference to Jonah in the body of the fish, as we might quote an imaginary incident in a novel of Sir Walter Scott's, by way of illustration. But in our Lord's words, not only do the two go together, but they are joined as cause and effect. The sign was the

means of the repentance. If the sign, the entombment of the prophet and his resurrection, as it might be called, was an imaginary incident, so must have been the repentance.

These two facts admitted, they carry the whole book along with them. They are the chief wonders in the book, one physical and the other moral; and they pre-suppose what goes before, a Divine commission to the prophet to preach in Nineveh, the casting of the prophet into the sea, and his being saved from death by means of a great fish.

Can any interpretation be put on our Lord's words but that which is literal and obvious? Dr. C. H. H. Wright argues that another interpretation is preferable. "Christ's references (he says) to the narrative of Jonah do not necessarily imply the historical truth of the event in the precise form in which it is presented in the Book of Jonah"—a statement which is almost Delphic in its ambiguity. What is meant by the precise form? If the historical truth of the event is implied in any form, in what other form, less or more precise, could it have been implied? Our Lord used the very words of the book, and these words are most precisely historical. What they implied He implied. The book says, "Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." \* Christ says, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish's belly"—and this without note or comment of any kind. But what Dr. Wright denies is not some particular "form" of historic truth, but historic truth altogether.

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\* It may not be unnecessary to remark on the words, "three days and three nights." That our Lord was in the grave only from our

For historical truth he substitutes allegorical truth. "The references of our Lord would be fully justified even if it could be shown that the Book of Jonah was an allegory or symbolical prophecy, like Ezekiel's description (ch. xxiii.) of Oholah and Oholibah, or like our Lord's own story of the prodigal son and his elder brother (Luke xv.)." And the task which Dr. Wright sets himself in his essay on the subject is to show that that is the true character of the book. "The history of Israel (he says) repeated itself substantially more than once; and the repetition of Israelitish history, which forms, as we maintain, the main sum and substance of the prophecy of the book, took place in the early Christian era. . . . Time only can solve the problem whether there be any basis of historical truth at the bottom of the narrative or not." Meantime it is assumed that there is not, and the whole book must be interpreted allegorically.

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Friday afternoon to our Sunday morning, is certain. The apostolic testimony was that He rose on the third day (I. Cor. xv. 4.). Our Lord's own words, as reported in Matt. xvi. 21 and Luke ix. 22, are, that He should be raised from the dead *on the third day*. But Mark (viii. 31) reports Him to have said that He should rise again *after three days*. We have not here a contradiction, but a different form of expression. We find the same difference as old as the times of II. Chronicles x., where, "Come again after three days," ver. 5, is in ver. 12 repeated as "Come again on the third day." Compare also Esther iv. 16, with v. 1. "The expression, three days and three nights, is an elastic Hebrew idiom, representing a space of time that might indeed cover three complete days and three complete nights, but that might also shrink considerably, both at the beginning and at the ending. In every day usage it got rubbed down, and was freely employed if the middle day and night were complete, though only portions of the other two were added."

Let us accept this as a hypothesis, and see how it will work. The people whom Christ addressed are familiar with the story, and are all unconscious that it is only a parable which contains hidden truth. Such, however, we are now told is the case. The Jonah of the book is not a man, but a name—a symbol of the nation of Israel which, in certain passages of Isaiah, is called the servant of Jehovah. It is not a man Jonah that shrank from fulfilling the Lord's purpose towards the Gentiles, it is the nation of Israel; no man Jonah was cast into the deep and swallowed up by a sea monster, but the nation of Israel was swallowed up by the "world power"; no Jonah was cast into the sea, and therefore no Jonah could be saved from it, but the nation, overwhelmed for a time by the "world power," was delivered from it and rose again; no Jonah went to Nineveh and turned the Ninevites from their evil ways, but the nation of Israel were "the prophets of humanity, intended by Divine providence to be the teachers of religion to the world," and, when their mission to the world received its chief accomplishment in Apostolic times, they regarded its success grudgingly; the spirit ascribed to Jonah in the book being the spirit of the elder son in our Lord's parable, and finding its analogue in the spirit with which even Christians of the Jewish nation regarded their Gentile brethren.

Let us read our Lord's words, in the light of this hypothesis of a symbolic and not a personal Jonah, with the help of Archdeacon Perowne: "We are to suppose Him to say that imaginary persons who, at the imaginary preaching of an imaginary prophet, repented

in imagination, shall rise upon that day and condemn the actual impenitence of those His actual hearers; that the fictitious characters of a parable shall be arraigned at the same bar with the living men of that generation.”—*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, p. 51.

This then is the true Jonah, symbolic, not real, and if we accept it as a hypothesis, it brings us face to face with a problem which is “too painful for us.” Did Christ know the true meaning of the book—that it was not a history, but a parable, and such a parable as I have briefly sketched? If He did, how is it that He made no use of its teaching *as such*? And how is it that the only use He made of it was based on the popular notion that it was a record of facts? He did not say, “As the nation of Israel has in times past been nigh unto death through oppression, so shall I die and rise again.” This would have been a very far-fetched analogy, and unintelligible to the multitude, without some critical exposition of the fact that both Israel and Christ were the servants of God (Isaiah xlv. 1, iii. 13), though in different ways. But if we should allow it in itself as possible, how is it to be squeezed into or out of Christ’s reference to Jonah? What of the three days in the entombment of Jonah and in the entombment of Christ? What of the sign of the Prophet Jonas? And what of the words, “A greater than Jonas is here”? It is evident that Christ treated the “hero” of the book as a man, and not as a symbol, and the facts of the book as historic, and not as symbolic. Could He have done this if He had known that it was not so?



Or shall we suppose that Christ did not know the truth of the matter, and that it was *bonâ fide*, but in ignorance, that He said, "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the fish's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"? Such ignorance would be very marvellous, and not to be accounted for by the limitations of His incarnate state. He knew, foreknew, all about His coming death and resurrection (compare Psalm xl 6, 7, and Heb. x. 9). It is written, "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the spirit by measure unto Him" (John iii. 34). But on this occasion, though filled with the Spirit, He was ignorant of the true meaning of the Book of Jonah, and asserted as a fact, analogous to His own death and resurrection, what was not a fact, but at best only a parabolic fiction.

The theory now made popular by the "Lux Mundi" critics does not relieve us of the difficulty in which we are thus landed. It has no bearing upon it. Be it that the validity of citations from the Old Testament by Christ and His Apostles did not depend on their authorship—although in some cases it certainly did\*—and that it is the books themselves and their contents that Christ and His contemporaries had to do with. This is enough for our present purpose. The authorship of the Book of Jonah and the date of its origin, are critical or literary questions, on which Christ pronounced no judgment. But on the *contents* of the book He did,

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\* See the author's "Popular Argument for the Unity of Isaiah," pp. 133—140.



for He re-asserted them, and based on them most significant and solemn instruction.

We are confirmed in this judgment by our Lord's reference to the Queen of the South. The story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon is recorded in the tenth of I. Kings. With Christ's words before us, can it be an open question whether that story is trustworthy history or only a legend? He says, "She came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon," thus positively re-asserting the statement of the Book of Kings. Shall we wait for confirmation of it until some adventurous explorer shall have dug up the remains of Sabœan and Himyerite cities and buildings? I for one cannot. "I believe in Christ." The truth and significance both of His comparison of Himself with Solomon, and of His reference to the final judgment, depends on the reality of the fact recorded in the Old Testament.

Of our Lord's many references to historic facts in the Old Testament, we quote one which our Lord quoted in illustration of His own work, much as He quoted from the Book of Jonah. In the twenty-first of Numbers we read of the judgment of fiery serpents, with which God punished the ungrateful and unbelieving murmurings of the Israelites, and how, on their confession of their sin, He said to Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole, and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it shall live." A serpent of brass was made accordingly, and the Divine promise was fulfilled. To this incident Christ referred in these words: "As

Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John iii. 14). To any one who should say that the story in Numbers is a mere legend, or at best any echo of a vague tradition, or who should say that it asserts an impossibility, the Christian has only to reply that the Son of man, Son of God, who could not be mistaken, regarded it as a fact, a fact so significant that He used it in illustration of the great deliverance from sin and death which He came to accomplish.

Between the use which Christ made of the Bible reference to the brazen serpent and that to Jonah there is a marked correspondence. In neither case are we entitled to speak of a type—at least, if we include in our definition of type an intended prefiguration of that which is the antitype. Nor are we entitled to speak of either as containing a prophecy of Christ. This is indeed sometimes done, especially in the case of Jonah. Dr. Wright, to strengthen his position that "the history of the Messiah is foreshadowed in the history of Israel," and thereby strengthen his position that the book is an allegory, and not a history, says, "The Book of Jonah is expressly referred to by our Lord as containing a prophecy of His death by the hands of the Gentiles, and of His resurrection after three days." Is it so? Christ foretells His own death by the hands of wicked men, and His resurrection after three days, as He had done on other occasions and in different forms. But He does not say that the facts alleged in the history of Jonah were in any sense pro-

phetic of these events. If you *assume* that that fact was no fact, but a figure of speech, you may likewise assume that the Inspired Allegorist who used that figure of speech meant to foretell the death and resurrection of Christ. But hypothesis added to hypothesis lands you at best in a conclusion which has only hypothetic value. Unfortunately for all such reasoning, our Lord accepted, as I think I have proved, the statement of the Book of Jonah as a plain matter of fact, as much so as the story of the brazen serpent. And in both of them He found illustrative analogies of Himself—in the one case of His power to save, in the other of the death and resurrection which were now near at hand. If we may not minimise our Lord's meaning, neither may we put into His words ideas or thoughts of our own.

The conclusion, we maintain, that Christ's reference to Jonah is an explicit confirmation of the historic character of the book, is strengthened by the very title with which He honours Jonah. He calls him the Prophet Jonah. That title could scarcely be based on the mere incident that Jonah foretold the recovery of certain territories by King Jeroboam II. The predicting of the future was but a part of the prophetic function, an incidental part of it. The prophets were inspired preachers of the Divine will, mostly with regard to the present. Such were Elijah and Elisha, who had a mission to the kings and people of their own age, but foretold no future events. Jonah was known as a prophet, not because he uttered a single prediction which was fulfilled, but because it was known that he had a Divine mission to speak in God's name

to the people of Nineveh. But for this mission he might have been forgotten. But this mission, recorded in the book which bears his name, ranked him in all succeeding ages as one of the prophets of Jehovah. As such he was known to the people whom Christ addressed, and Christ could not have been mistaken when He gave him the significant title by which he was popularly known.



## CHAPTER VI.

### SOME OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

WITH so much and such varied evidence in support of the proper historic character of the Book of Jonah, the reasons that shall justify the denial of it must be strong indeed. What are they? What can be alleged to cast doubt on the course of argument which I have traced, or to weaken its force? Very little that is not either purely negative or subjective, or both. Most modern critics are eager to make us understand that they do not question the reality of miracles as such, and that their doubts of the historicity of Jonah are not based on the alleged miracle of the fish. But there is something about this miracle which awakens misgiving in their minds, and they describe it with epithets which seem to me dishonouring to the author of the miracle, if it be a miracle, and to our Lord who quoted it, as furnishing an apt analogy with those great events in His own history—burial and resurrection. If there be anything in this miracle out of keeping and harmony with the usual character of the supernatural in the Bible, the objection lies against the theory of an inspired allegory as forcibly as against the theory of its literal occurrence—an argument this which has to be

repeated at various points. My contention, it will be remembered, is that the great miracle by which Jonah was preserved is not only in perfect keeping with the historic truth of the narrative, but is an essential part of it, and is as homogeneous with the circumstances of this prophet as were the miracles of Moses and Elijah with theirs, and as those recorded in the Book of Daniel, with his times and circumstances. If it be not, how could an *inspired* allegorist imagine it? His inspired imagination should have kept within the limits of the possible and the probable, and should not have *created* an incident that was out of harmony with the known manner of God's dealings with those ancient times.

Some of the objections taken to the historical character of the book are *very small*, and such as might be taken to any history that has ever been written. For example: there is scarcely a critic of the denial school who does not object that the book does not name the King of Nineveh at the time of Jonah's mission. To me it seems strange that such an objection should be made seriously. The object of the book was not to give us a portion of Assyrian history and tell us the sequence of the Assyrian monarchs. It was other and higher, and altogether independent of the name of the king.

We are further told that there is no notice of Jonah on any Assyrian tablet yet discovered, and, in fact, no confirmation of the story in what is called profane history. As to the Assyrian tablets, I do not seek refuge in the fact that much yet remains to be dis-

covered, and that possibly the name of Jonah may yet be found on one of them. The very existence of the Belshazzar of the Book of Daniel was long questioned, because "profane history" made no mention of him. But a few years ago Colonel Rawlinson, at last and unexpectedly, found the name on a Babylonian tablet. As for Jonah, we have no need to wait for any such discovery. In a Persian inscription there were found some years ago the words, "The lie was abounding in the land." The lie abounds in Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions.

It is the testimony of all writers on the subject that in the monumental histories of Egypt and Assyria, which recent discoveries have brought to light, there is a studious concealment, or passing by, of events which did not contribute to the glory of the monarch or the nation. Royal defeats and national disasters are either unrecorded or recorded with a gloss which misrepresents their true character. The mission of Jonah, with its denouncement of the wickedness of the people of Nineveh, and the threat of impending destruction, was the very last subject to find record on an Assyrian tablet. If Dr. Wright must doubt "whether there be any basis of historical truth at the bottom of the narrative" in the Book of Jonah, until "time" shall do what he says "time only can do," "finally resolve the problem," by means of some Assyrian discovery, he is likely to carry his doubts with him to the grave.

This demand for the corroboration of "profane history" has far-reaching consequences evidentially. We are thankful for the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Babylonian discoveries, which have within this



century thrown so much light on the Biblical records. But we did not suspend our faith in these records until they were thus confirmed; although those who "would not hear Moses and the prophets" are now disposed to show some deference to hieroglyphics and cuneiform tablets. To come to a later period. We accept, with gratitude, I may say with wonder, the confirmatory light which Professor Ramsay's "Church in the Roman Empire" has shed on the travels of the Apostle Paul in Asia Minor, as recorded in the book called "The Acts of the Apostles." But we did not suspend our faith in this book till Professor Ramsay had explored Asia Minor, and discovered, deciphered, and translated the inscriptions which remain to this day, in places of note where Paul preached the Gospel and founded Christian churches. Even now the name of "Saint Paul" is not found in any of these inscriptions, and it is only indirectly, though not less effectually, that they corroborate the written story of St. Luke. We have to accept by far the greater part of Bible history without reference to extra-Biblical corroboration.

It is further objected that we have no account of the journeyings of Jonah, either before or after his visit to Nineveh. I ask, Why should we? The book does not profess to be a biography of the prophet. It tells us all that was necessary for the purpose for which it was written; and details such as might gratify curiosity respecting the man's personal fortunes, as they might be called, would not add to its verisimilitude, but rather detract from it. Critics who raise such objections as this must surely forget how they

might tell against a more important book, and a more important person than Jonah. "The Acts of the Apostles" gives us no details of the "journeyings oft," by land and sea, of the Apostle Paul, except in the one instance of the shipwreck at Melita, and tells us nothing of the when and how of his death. It breaks off even more abruptly than does the Book of Jonah.

There is one difficulty, however, to which special importance is attached, and which needs to be carefully considered. Let it be stated in full in the words of Dr. Wright: "The most formidable difficulties in the way of regarding the Book of Jonah to be a record of historical fact do not arise from the miracles therein recorded. The greatest difficulty is the absence of the slightest allusion in any other part of the Old Testament to the mission on which Jonah was sent, notwithstanding its marvellous accompaniments and its wonderful success. For if these be facts of history, the mission of Jonah was the most stupendous event which happened to any of the Hebrew prophets. Why should such a mission be passed over in the historical books of the Old Testament, in which matters of far inferior importance are related circumstantially? It is, moreover, inconceivable that the prophets who prophesied so much concerning Assyria should never have alluded to such a fact, if it were a simple matter of history."—*Studies*, p. xiv.

Dr. Wright returns to the subject on p. 72: "No prophet was ever despatched on a grander and more important mission; and the outcome of Jonah's preaching, if the narrative be regarded as history, was

the most wonderful success ever experienced. When compared with the result of Jonah's preaching, Elijah's controversy with Israel on Mount Carmel (I. Kings xviii.) sinks into utter insignificance. Why then should the latter incident be recorded in the Books of the Kings (I. Kings xviii.), whilst the most extraordinary fact connected with a prophet is passed over in silence by the Hebrew historians ?

The greater part of the objections that are here mixed up together has been anticipated. As to the story of Jonah not being told in the Book of Kings, I need only repeat that it has had a more important place assigned to it, in being made the subject of a separate book. And the bearing of the success ascribed to the mission of Jonah on the question of the historicity of the book has been fully considered. (Chapter III.) As to "extraordinary facts connected with prophets," it is no part of the function of "Hebrew historians" to record them. They were not biographers of the prophets. They had to do with the prophets only in their relation to the work assigned to them. And we have to do with the miracle of the "great fish," not as an "extraordinary incident" in the life of Jonah, but in its relation to his mission to Nineveh. Viewed in this relation, we are not prepared to admit that it was more "extraordinary" than the miracle on Mount Carmel, when the fire of the Lord fell from heaven and consumed the burnt sacrifice—a miracle which appeared so extraordinary to the people that they all fell on their faces and exclaimed, "Jehovah, He is the God ; Jehovah, He is the God." It is quite conceivable that the prophets who came after saw much more in Elijah than in Jonah, and

were conscious that his ministry had infinitely more to do with the history of their nation than had that of Jonah. And if so, their silence in regard to Jonah—assuming that his book is historical—is nothing as compared with their silence respecting Elijah.

This brings us to what seems to me the fundamental error or weakness of Dr. Wright's argument. It is found in these words: "When compared with the result of Jonah's preaching, Elijah's controversy with Israel on Mount Carmel sinks into utter insignificance." And then, "If these (the statements of the book) be facts of history, the mission of Jonah was the most stupendous event which ever happened to any of the Hebrew prophets." Big epithets—"extraordinary" and "stupendous"—cannot be accepted in lieu of argument. Clear up the meaning of these statements, and it will soon be seen how little sound reasoning they contain. Take the first of them. The comparison we have to deal with is not between "the *result* of Jonah's preaching and Elijah's *controversy* with Israel," but between the mission of Jonah to Nineveh and the mission of Elijah to Israel on Mount Carmel; and, thus stated, the mission of Elijah, instead of sinking into utter insignificance, will be found, as has been shown in a former chapter, and must be further insisted on, to have been the most important event in the spiritual training of Israel. As to *results*, the immediate result was remarkably alike in both cases—an immediate impression on Israel, and an immediate impression on Nineveh.

Now take the second statement. Here again the comparison is vague and incorrect. "The mission of Jonah" is described as an *event*, and as such it is

more stupendous than any event that has happened to any other prophet. The proper comparison is between "the *mission* of Jonah" and "the *mission* of any other prophet." And the epithet "stupendous" is very inappropriate as applied to a mission, whatever it may be as applied to a miracle.

But now as to the significance or insignificance of Elijah and his work on Mount Carmel, a few words must be added to what has been said in the second chapter. It is there maintained that the mission of Elijah and Elisha, pre-eminently of Elijah, occupies a very special place in the spiritual history of Israel. We have no book bearing his name, but we have a record of his work. It was a revival of the conflict which had been waged in Egypt in the days of Pharaoh. The question at issue was not a question of names, as between "Jehovah" and "Baal," but, as we have seen, whether the fruits of the victory won in the conflict with Pharaoh were to be lost. The conflict between the worship of the Creator and the worship of the creature was renewed; and if not won for Jehovah, the "signs and wonders wrought in the land of Ham" were all in vain. The very special importance of the position of Elijah in the prophetic roll appears in the fact that he was chosen to be the type of the forerunner of the Incarnate Son of God. "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." A more remarkable proof still of its importance we find in the wonderful story of the Transfiguration (Luke ix. 28—36). "Behold there talked with Jesus two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory, and spoke of His decease which He should

accomplish at Jerusalem." Why Moses we can understand. He was the founder, and therefore the fit representative of the Law which had been the school-master (R.V. the tutor, Gal. iii. 24), to bring them to Christ.\* But why Elijah? And especially when the subject of converse was "the decease which Jesus was to accomplish at Jerusalem." Surely fitter than he would have been the great prophet, often called the greatest of the prophets, who wrote, "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. . . . But He was wounded for our transgressions. . . . The chastisement of our peace was upon Him." What Elijah knew of the decease at Jerusalem he must have learned in heaven. He did not prophesy of that great mysterious event, and he was neither the earliest nor the latest of the prophets. Why should he be one of the deputies sent from heaven to converse with the Lord of the prophets, and to share the glory (Luke ix. 31) of His transfiguration? There must have been a reason, and the reason is not hidden from us. It is to be found in the unique position which his prophetic mission occupied in Israel, demonstrating afresh and finally, and for all succeeding generations, what had been proved by the ministry of Moses, that "Jehovah—He is God." It was the work of the prophetic successors

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\* Even as to Moses, if he had so little to do with "the Law" as a certain class of modern critics allege, we may ask why he should be the favoured one to come from heaven? Why not the unknown author of Deuteronomy? Or the unknown of the days of Ezra? Was Heaven as ignorant as earth as to whom it is that we owe "the Law," which is popularly, but we are now told incorrectly, associated with the name of Moses?



of Elijah to teach and enforce the doctrine which he demonstrated, and further to develop the purpose of Jehovah in making Israel the conservator of this great doctrine, until it should have demonstration of another kind in the person and teaching of a Divine Messiah. But Elijah's work was done once for all, as was that of Moses, and, in the judgment of Heaven—I say it reverently—he, the foremost and boldest of the prophets, whose high mission it was to rescue the economy which had been founded by Moses from the destruction with which it was threatened, was the fittest representative of “the prophets,” as Moses was of “the Law,” to come down and for a brief space to converse with Him to whom the Law and the Prophets had long borne witness.

Where now is the “insignificance” of the mission of Elijah as compared with that of Jonah ?

And yet, special and unique as was the position of Elijah, his very name is not once referred to by subsequent prophets, till we come to the very last verse of the Old Testament ; and then only to announce the coming of another who, as afterwards interpreted, should be not himself, but one like him in spirit and power (Luke i. 17). There are incidental references to Mount Carmel—geographically, so to speak—in Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah, but not the remotest reference to the great event of the conflict between Jehovah and Baal ; although that conflict might well be called one of the “decisive battles,” if not of the world, at least of Israel. A chief function of these prophets was to denounce the idolatry into which both Judah and Israel were constantly falling ; and yet they make no appeal to the special demon-



stration which was given in the ministry of Elijah. Is it that they never heard of it, or thought it "of little significance"? It can be neither. And if so, why should the silence of the prophets in reference to Jonah be interpreted into a proof that they never heard of him or of his mission to Nineveh? So far as *silence* is an argument, the story of Elijah and the story of Jonah stand or fall together. I do not think, however, that it would be difficult to account for a silence which seems strange to us—each prophet having his own particular "burden" from the Lord, and none of them needing to refer to, or to depend on, another, for the authority of his message. But I will not digress into a discussion of this matter. And I need not, for my Lord put his seal on both Jonah and Elijah.



## CHAPTER VII.

### IF NOT HISTORICAL, WHAT THEN ?

**I**F allegorical, we meet the allegorist on the very threshold of his theory, with a challenge to explain how the author of the book dared to say, "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh." Writing, as our critics allege, after the Babylonian exile, he had in his hand the books of many prophets, and he read in them this significant formula: "Jeremiah, to whom the word of the Lord came"—"The word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel"—"The word of the Lord that came to Hosea"—"The word of the Lord that came to Joel"—"The word of the Lord that came to Micah"—"The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah"—"Came the word of the Lord by Haggai"—"Came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah." The same formula is used with reference to the historical Jonah himself in the second book of Kings (xiv. 25), "According to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai." Using this unmistakable form of speech, the author of the Book of Jonah says in his first sentence, "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah;" and he repeats it

when Jonah was delivered from the fish, "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh." He is careful to identify the person to whom he refers, that it might be known that it is no other than the prophet of the days of Jeroboam, by calling him what he is called in the history of the Kings, "the son of Amittai." He leaves no room open for question, conjecture, or imagination. His language is the language of plain history.

Could an allegorist have thus written? Only if he meant to deceive. If self-deceived, or if "inspired," he might say, "The word of the Lord came to me, commanding me to write a parable." But he could not say that "the word of the Lord" came to him commanding him to say in his parable, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah," if it had not come to him. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

"The theory that is to hold the field," says Professor Robertson, in the "Baird Lecture," in reference to another question, "must not only raise difficulties, but must lay them, and must, on the view of all the facts of the case, commend itself on literary and critical and common-sense grounds as the better explanation." Now the flounderings of the critics, from one thing to another, show that their inventiveness hitherto has failed to discover any such theory as this in the matter of the Book of Jonah.

Of theories, not historical, which claim for the book, or allow it, a place in Holy Scripture, the extremest

that I know is the mythical theory of Professor Cheyne. The words legend and myth are very imposing, and carry with them an air of mystery which, like a ghost, frightens and bewilders simple minds. To define them is not easy. But, properly speaking, a myth may be said to be the creation of a fact out of an idea; and a legend, the seeing of an idea in a fact, or arising out of it. The myth is, therefore, pure and absolute imagination, having no basis of fact whatsoever; the legend is presumably founded in fact, but amplifies, abridges, or modifies it, not by design, but by changes which take place undesignedly in the course of time.

These definitions and distinctions are for the most part practically forgotten. And in discussing Professor Cheyne's view of Jonah, we might almost as well write fabulous and semi-fabulous for mythical and semi-mythical. He says, "To me it appears in the highest degree probable that the story of the Book of Jonah is not merely not in all points, but not in any point, historical. . . . The romantic form of literature which flourished among the later Jews must have had a beginning. Tobit cannot have been its first specimen. It also appears to me more than probable that there is a mythic element in the story of Jonah. I do not mean that the story is itself a popular myth, but, as I showed in 1877, the author of Jonah (like the writer of Jeremiah li. 34—44) adopted a well-known Oriental expression, based upon a solar myth. . . . The younger generation, who have felt the fascination of myths . . . will be well pleased with the discovery (?) that the story of Jonah (like that of Esther) con-

tains an element of mythic symbol. They will reverence its writer as one of those inspired men who could convert mythic and semi-mythic stories and symbols into vehicles of spiritual truth."—*The Expositor*, February, 1892.

What the myths are by which the learned Professor is "fascinated" I do not know. It can scarcely be the Greek myths of Perseus and Andromeda, and of Hercules and Hesione, for he says, "To suppose a direct imitation of these myths in Jonah is quite gratuitous." It must be equally gratuitous to suppose imitation of, or analogy with, Babylonian and Egyptian myths which have "affinities for the Greek myths in question." "Mr. Tylor (he says) has already pointed out the close superficial resemblance between the story of Jonah and various solar myths." Turning to one of his references (*Tylor's Early History of Mankind*, pp. 336, 7), I find Mr. Tylor—after many pages of stories gathered mainly from Polynesia and the American Indians, too fantastic, absurd, and meaningless to be designated even myths—quoting two stories, one a Chippewa tale, another a Hindoo tale, which come nearest to the story of Jonah. And he adds, "The analogy of these curious tales with the leading episode in the Book of Jonah is of course evident, and it might appear as though this very ancient story were possibly the direct origin of one or both of them; as regards dates, the American story has been but recently taken down, and even the Hindoo tale only comes out of a mediæval Sanskrit collection. But both agree in differing from the history of Jonah in the fish being cut open to let the man out. Something

very like this occurs in the myth of the Polynesian sun-god Mani." Then follow pages of attempts to catch and chain the sun, with other equally rational things, ancient and modern, not forgetting Tom Thumb, Little Red Riding Hood, and Jack and the Beanstalk!

There can have been nothing more puerile or foolish in the old wives' *myths* and the Jewish *myths*—disguised, perhaps I might say rather revealed, in the translation *fables*, against which the Apostle warns Timothy and Titus. And yet these are "the mythic and semi-mythic stories and symbols" which an "inspired" writer has, in the Book of Jonah, converted into "vehicles of spiritual truth!" It would have been far easier for him to invent or imagine "vehicles of spiritual truth" out of his own brain and heart than out of a mass of meaningless absurdities called mythic and semi-mythic stories. Besides, how could a man really inspired, conscious of moulding myths into an allegory, say, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh"? Either the myth or the inspiration must be abandoned. If the Book of Jonah belongs to "the romantic class of literature which flourished among the later Jews," and of which "the Book of Tobit is a specimen," it should have had its place, not in the Canon alongside Hosea and Micah, but in the Apocrypha alongside Tobit and Bel and the Dragon.

The other alternatives to the historical theory, which may be classed under the general description of parabolic or allegorical, have to be sub-divided into

those which acknowledge some basis in fact and those which do not.

Canon Driver says, "No doubt the materials of the narrative were supplied to the author by tradition, and rest ultimately on a basis of fact; no doubt the outlines of the narrative are historical, and Jonah's preaching was actually successful (Luke xi. 30, 31), though not (he says) on the scale represented in the book. These materials the author cast into a literary form, in such a manner as to set forcibly before his readers the truths which he desired them to take to heart."—*Introduction to the Old Testament*.

This comes very nearly to an acknowledgment of the historical character of the book. But Dr. Driver looks with favour on the allegorical theory; and, if the "materials supplied by tradition," and "historical outlines," were cast into a literary form for the sake of the truths which the writer desired to teach, the book is in no sense a reliable record of actual facts. It is only the literary form into which an unknown author cast traditional materials which had come into his hands, and may be practically as far from truth as if it had no foundation in fact.

On this and other acknowledgments of some foundation in fact for the story of the Book of Jonah, let me remark (1) that they all assume that the book was not written for some hundreds of years—some say three, some five, some six hundred years—after the lifetime of Jonah; (2) that whatever knowledge



the writer had of events in the life of Jonah, it had come to him by tradition; and (3) that, written so long after the event, and from uncertain materials, it cannot claim our faith as a reliable history. Admit the premises, and this conclusion follows inevitably. Tradition may preserve for centuries certain bare public facts, which stand out in bold relief from an unwritten page of national history; it cannot preserve minute details, especially of spoken words. So that much that we find in the Book of Jonah cannot have come to the author by tradition. His own literary skill must have supplied it.

At first sight it would seem that admit a foundation in fact for the story of Jonah, and you render support to its credibility. But it raises moral questions of a serious kind. What, and how much of fact did the author find in tradition to work upon? Did he use his materials honestly, or did he tamper with them? In either case, we ask how much of the present book do we owe to tradition, and how much to the author's invention? And as to tradition, even if we knew what it reported to the author, we have to ask how much of it was genuine, and how much was legendary? Amid these perplexities, it is almost better to say—Give us an allegory, pure and simple, the work of a man who used a free hand, and followed the leadings of his own imagination, rather than an allegory based on fact, fiction, and tradition.

That the book may be and is an allegory, without any basis in fact or history, is held by critics whose

respect for and loyalty to Holy Scripture is undoubted. Dr. C. H. H. Wright says, "Some well-intentioned defenders of Scripture, who 'have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge' (Rom. x. 2), often maintain that nothing in the sacred writings ought to be regarded as allegorical, unless distinctly set forth as such. Such objectors forget that allegorical narratives were always wont to be related as historical facts, though the meaning might afterwards, in some cases (though not in all), be explained by the narrator."—*Biblical Essays*, p. xxv. The examples given are almost all of them simply parables, as much so as those of our Lord. They are that of Nathan, II. Samuel xii. 1—7; that of the woman of Tekoa, II. Samuel xiv.; that of a prisoner let loose by one of the sons of the prophets, I. Kings xx. 39—41; and what he calls "the more sublime parable of Micaiah," I. Kings xxii. 19—22. We are further reminded "that it is still a question whether the narrative in the commencement of Hosea is fact or allegory, and whether Jeremiah actually visited the Euphrates to hide his girdle there. Elsewhere the Aholah and Aholibah of Ezek. xxiii. are referred to as illustrations. And the remark is made, "Many things are related as facts which were designed only to be understood as allegories. Nor is it strange that such allegories should, in process of time, have been sometimes mistaken for history."

The fallacy which runs through the whole of this statement is disguised by the use of the term allegory for parable. The difference between the two may, it is true, be more subtle than palpable.

Enough for the purpose of the present argument

that Bible readers are practically familiar with the idea of a parable, not with the idea of an allegory; and when parables, and all things symbolical and metaphorical, are described as allegorical, nothing but confusion is the result. Now let us substitute parable for allegory in the sentences quoted from Dr. Wright: "Such objectors forget that parables were always wont to be related as historical facts." "Many things are related as facts which were designed only to be understood as parables. Nor is it strange that such parables should in process of time have been sometimes mistaken for history." Dr. Wright may be challenged to produce one instance in which a Bible parable has been mistaken in process of time for a history. Our Lord's recorded parables number some thirty, and not one of them has ever been mistaken for a history, or for a historical fact. Their proper character was recognised when they were uttered, and no process of time has ever thrown doubt upon it. Of the instances quoted from the Old Testament, there are only two that are parables in any proper sense of the word—that of Nathan, and of the woman of Tekoa; and if for a moment David did not see their bearing on himself, it was only for a moment. "The process of time," prolonged through many centuries, has not converted them into historical facts. As to the scene described in I. Kings xi. 19—23, it is symbolic, if not parabolic, and whatever meaning it had at first it has still, unaffected by "the process of time." And as to Aholah and Aholibah, they are explicitly stated to be symbolic names for Samaria and Jerusalem (Ezek. xxiii. 4).

While there is not a shadow of evidence that Biblical parables or allegories have, in process of time, been mistaken for historical facts, there is abundant evidence of the converse process ; at least, of a process or processes by which historical facts cease to be historical, and become fiction, or myth, or allegory, or whatever else the critic may please to make of them. Philo treated historical realities like clay, which he moulded at his pleasure. It was one of his canons that, "anything unmeaning, impossible, or contrary to reason," was to be interpreted allegorically. And thus—he being the judge of what is impossible, or contrary to reason—he cut the knot of whatever difficulties seemed insuperable.

Without following Philo's canons, certain modern critics follow his practice, and, with equal facility, etherealise history into parables or poetry. Even the story of Elijah, which, as I have shown, throws so much light on the story of Jonah, does not escape this process of transformation. Reading Dr. Cheyne's book, "*The Hallowing of Criticism*," we pause again and again, and wonder whether the author regards the details, which he describes with so much pathos, as historically true. We come to the end, and, after following the story of the ascension of the prophet from point to point, we read, "Surely I may call this narrative the grandest prose poem in the Old Testament."

If the history of Elijah can be treated as half history and half myth, or all myth—call it prose-poem, or fiction, or allegory, or aught else of the same kind—we need not wonder that the history of his prophetic successor, Jonah, should share the same

fate, and be regarded at best as but an allegory devoid of historical substance.

Dr. Wright is not satisfied with the attempts of his predecessors to explain the allegory of Jonah. Cheyne's "myth-theory is not satisfactory (he says), notwithstanding all that has been urged by that scholar in its favour." Bergmann's theory of "a religious philosophical parable" is still less satisfactory, reverting, as he does, "to the old rationalistic standpoint," and being supported by "strange fancies, which the Professor ventures to put forward as sober exegesis" (p. xxvi.). Dr. Wright was "put upon the right track to the solution of the curious difficulties of the book," by suggestive remarks of Rabbi J. S. Block; but, even including Block, "the previous attempts to explain the book as an allegory must (he says) be regarded as failures" (p. 53). The puzzle is now solved. The true meaning of the allegory of Jonah has been at last discovered in the end of the nineteenth century of the Christian era.

The book, as now rightly understood, is a "historical, symbolical prophecy" (p. 90), or a "symbolical, historical prophecy" (p. 79), or a "prophetico-allegorical history" of the people of Israel (p. 69). Symbol I know, history I know, and prophecy I know. But I scarcely know how to combine the three. The very principle of the hypothesis is that the book is not a history—that is, that it has not even a basis in history. Is it a prophecy? "The Book of Jonah is expressly referred to by our Lord (Dr. Wright says) as containing a prophecy of His death by the hands of the Gentiles, and of His resurrection after three

days" (p. 91). But our Lord's words do not either expressly, or by implication, suggest that Jonah's entombment in the fish was a prophecy of His death. It might as well be argued that the brazen serpent was a prophecy of Christ being lifted up on the cross.

Not being a prophecy, and not being a history, nothing remains for the allegorist but the idea of a symbol. Now to prove that the book is capable of a symbolical interpretation with some degree of naturalness, though aided by fancy, is not even an approach to proof that the book is not literally and strictly historical. "Happily," says Godet, in commenting on Baur's regarding the Samaritan woman of John iv. as a mere impersonation of the Gentile world,— "Happily, real history has its ideal side. Otherwise it would be only an accumulation of facts without significance. From the circumstance that a fact has a prophetic (or didactic) value, it does not follow that it is a mere fiction." How truly this applies to many incidents in the forty years' pilgrimage in the wilderness, and even to the pilgrimage as a whole, and to very much of the patriarchal story, need not be told. Our practical and devotional Christian literature is full of the subject.

Dr. Wright himself admits this fully (pp. x., 34). Let him follow the example of the Apostle Paul in Gal. iv. 21—25. Paul accepted the statement of Abraham and his two sons, and their mothers, Hagar and Sarah, as literally and historically true, and saw in it at the same time an allegory which illustrated his doctrinal position in opposition to certain false teaching. Let the allegorist accept the story of Jonah as literal historic truth, and then, if he chooses, exercise



his ingenuity and skill in spiritualising the story. We may question his wisdom or success, and may be disposed to ascribe some of his points more to his ingenuity than to any real analogy with the facts of the story, but there our controversy with him shall end.

As to the details of the so-called allegorical theory now proposed with so much confidence as a substitute for the more obvious historic theory, it is not necessary that I should dwell on them, having already considered most of them in the course of my argument. The allegory, without a basis in fact, breaks down, as I have shown, in its attempt to explain the very beginning of the story in the book. It breaks down equally in explaining the end; for if Jonah be the symbol of the servant of the Lord—that is, of both Israel and the Messiah—it should have exhibited him at least not in the spirit of the narrow-minded Jew, who mourned that Nineveh was spared, but in the spirit of Him who wept over Jerusalem. The allegory breaks down in the middle likewise; the founding of the story of the fish on a metaphor, in the fifty-first of Jeremiah, being—I try to say it with due respect to those who believe it—little short of ludicrous; and the hymn of thanksgiving being so unconnected with the parable that, according to some at least, it is a later composition by a later author than that of the parable. How necessary the allegory finds it to forget well-known facts appears in these words: “The returning exiles of Israel were a ‘sign and a wonder’ unto the ‘men of that generation,’ to the men of Nineveh, to the inhabitants of Babylon” (Dr. Wright,



p. 64). The fact is, that when the exiles of Israel returned there were no men in Nineveh, that great city having been utterly destroyed B.C. 606, and the first return of the exiles taking place seventy years later, when the winds and sand and dust of the desert had begun to hide the temples and palaces of Nineveh beneath the mounds which are only now yielding up their treasures.

The allegorists ignore the substantial grounds on which we believe in the historical character of the book. They take no notice, as we have seen, of the solemn statement with which the book itself is prefaced, that "the word of the Lord came to Jonah." Nor can they find any explanation of how it happens that Jonah was made the hero of the allegory or tale, if the tale was only an "imaginative creation." To say that his name was chosen simply because he was a prophet, and one whose history was not known, is worse than no reason. What of Joel, or of Obadiah, of Nahum, of Habakkuk, and even of Malachi, about whose very name critics question whether it is a personal name, or only to be understood as meaning "my messenger." If the Book of Jonah is post-exilic, would not Malachi, a prophet of unknown history and the last of the prophets, have been the fittest man to represent Israel in such a parable as this, especially if his personality was concealed under the official designation of "my messenger"? But Jonah was a known prophet, of known parentage and place of birth, whose connection with the great prophets Elijah and Elisha could not be unknown. That it was possible for a prophet to act the un-

worthy part described in the book, alas! need not be doubted; and if he did act that part, the unvarnished recording of his conduct, without any attempt to palliate his sin, is in entire harmony with the spirit of Biblical history. But if Jonah had no such mission to Nineveh as is alleged in the book, and had not acted the part ascribed to him, both in the beginning and in the end of the book—that is, if the entire story is an allegory pure and simple—the man who wrote it was guilty of a gratuitous insult to the memory of a prophet, and could not have been inspired by the prophet's Master thus to dishonour a faithful servant.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is often quoted as illustrative of the allegory of Jonah. But our Lord did not use the name of a man well known in Jewish history to represent the father of the prodigal, so that the illustration fails in an essential point. He did not say, "Joshua, the high priest of the returning exiles had two sons," or "Zerubbabel, the prince of the returning exiles, had two sons," or "Simon the Just had two sons"; if He had it would have diverted attention from the moral of the parable to a personal family history. Besides, His hearers would say at once, "This cannot be true—we are not so told in the history of Joshua, or Zerubbabel, or Simon the Just—Thou dost not speak the truth." To establish an analogy between the allegory of the Book of Jonah and the parable of the Prodigal Son, you must either make the former anonymous or you must put a name into the latter. But you can do neither. The latter cannot be robbed of its precious and imperishable meaning by being converted into a personal incident in some family history. The former cannot be con-

verted into an allegory without doing despite to the claims of history, and to the memory of a prophet of the Most High.

From whatever point of view we study the allegorical interpretation of the Book of Jonah, we are only the more confirmed in the conviction that the book contains, and is, a historical narrative of a mission to which the prophet was called by the "word of the Lord."



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK AND THE DATE OF ITS COMPOSITION.

THE question of the authorship of the book and of the date of its composition is of practical importance only so far as it bears on the question of the historicity and historic trustworthiness of the narrative which it contains. If these questions were independent of each other, the matter of authorship and time of composition might be relegated to professed or professional critics, and left in their hands. But if it be found that the two questions are very closely connected, and have mutual bearings, the Christian *people* are entitled to know the reasons *pro* and *con.*; and they are quite capable of judging for themselves.

As to any argument which may be drawn from the language and style of the book, I might quote from Dr. Samuel Davidson, Dr. Pusey, Dr. Henderson, Dr. Driver, Dr. Douglas, A. S. Aglen (in Bishop Ellicott's Bible), Archdeacon T. T. Perowne, and Dr. C. von Orelli—confining myself to authors within the reach of English readers—to show that “the question of date is, in very slight degree, one of language.” The author of the commentary in Bishop Ellicott's Commentary

expresses the almost unanimous opinion when he says that "the linguistic argument may be used as strongly for the North Palestinian origin of the author as for his late date." Professor Cheyne said long ago that "the linguistic argument is not often of primary importance in the higher criticism of the Old Testament."

The dates assigned to the composition of the Book of Jonah are as many almost as the critics who deny its historical character; and it would be difficult to discover any principle by which these critics are ruled or guided to their conclusions, except it be, in the case of some, the desire to get away as far as possible from the lifetime of Jonah the prophet of the days of Jeroboam II. Some are content to find the origin of the book *about* the time of the Exile; the greater part *after* the Exile—some soon after, others long after. For example, Dr. Driver: "A date in the fifth century before Christ will probably not be far from the truth," *i.e.*, before B.C. 400. Dr. C. H. H. Wright: "Shortly after the governorship of Zerubbabel," which began B.C. 536. A writer in the *Expositor*: "Jonah lived 450 or 500 years before the book was written"—written, therefore, about B.C. 350 or 300. A. S. Aglen: "The existence of the book before the probable composition of the Book of Tobit, about B.C. 180, extremely doubtful." Professor Cheyne: "Tobit cannot have been the first of the romantic form of literature"—Jonah probably before it.

Dr. C. von Orelli differs from all these writers in rejecting entirely the theory which would explain the book as an allegory. He regards the mission of Jonah as historical, and even 'epoch-making';

but as to the composition of the book he says, "We shall do best of the last Chaldean or first Persian age." The "last Chaldean age" was the age of the Babylonian exile, and the "first Persian age" began with Cyrus, when Babylon was taken B.C. 538, and may be said to have lasted two hundred years. He rejects the theory that the book was written only in the Maccabean age, which may be said to begin about B.C. 166.

It will be observed that all these writers, except Orelli, assign the book to periods *after* the return from Babylon, ranging from the fifth to the second century before Christ. And Orelli differs from them only in supposing that it may have been written *before* the end of the Exile. But it is noticeable that scarcely any, if any, of those who assign a late date to the composition of the book attempt to show reasons why it may not have been contemporaneous with the mission which it records. They seem to take it for granted that it was not. But surely the *à priori* probability is in favour of the earlier rather than of the later date. And it is not to be set aside by the mere dictum of the critic.

Now let me call attention to certain dates which have an important bearing on the subject.

The first return of the exiles, under Zerubbabel, took place B.C. 536; the second return, under Ezra, B.C. 458. The destruction of Nineveh, which used to be assigned to between B.C. 625 and 600, is now assigned, on good grounds, to B.C. 606, that is, seventy years before Zerubbabel was commissioned by Cyrus, and a hundred and forty-eight years before Ezra was com-

missioned by Darius. I ask particular attention to these dates.

The destruction of Nineveh by the combined forces of Cyaxares, the King of the Medes, and Nabopolassar (Nebuchadnezzar's father), King of Babylon, was not the mere overthrow of its power and its subjection to Babylon. The city was laid waste, its monuments destroyed, and its inhabitants scattered or carried into captivity. In the tragic story of the fall and ruin of empires there is nothing more remarkable than the speedy and total disappearance of this great city. It is not mentioned in the Babylonian cuneiform inscriptions after its capture. About a hundred and fifty years after its destruction (B.C. 450), *i.e.*, about the time of Ezra's return, Herodotus must have passed very near its site, if he did not pass over it, on his way to Babylon, apparently all unconscious of the historic region which he traversed. Beyond the fact that Nineveh was on the Tigris, he knows little more. Equally conclusive proof of its condition is afforded by Xenophon, who, with the ten thousand Greeks, encamped during his retreat on or very near its site, in B.C. 401. Its very name had been forgotten; at least, he does not seem to have been acquainted with it.

The importance of these facts lies in this—that they prove that *Nineveh was not in existence at the dates to which critics assign the composition of the Book of Jonah*; yea, had gone out of existence long before the very earliest of them—two hundred years, three hundred years, and even four hundred years before some of them. Now turn to the Book of Jonah; and if any critical impression can be trusted, we are surely



justified in saying that it must have been written *before Nineveh had ceased to be a city*,\* had passed away so entirely that its very site had ceased to bear its name; and not in the midst of circumstances, historical, political, and social, so entirely different from those of the age of Jonah, as were those of the age of the Exile, or the ages following both in Palestine and in Babylon.

There is nothing which modern critics insist on more urgently than that we are entitled to expect to find some correspondence between a book and the age to which it professes to belong—some reflection, from the pages of the book, of the age of its origin, in style, habit of thought, or incidental reference. And although this principle of criticism is often carried to extremes which amount to little less than a *reductio ad absurdum*, it is true in the main, and may contribute to the detection of the false or the confirmation of the true. Let the Book of Jonah be subjected to this test. The most eager searcher for some indication in it, even the most casual, of Babylon and the days of the Chaldean empire; of Babylon and the days of the Persian empire; of Jewish men, prophets, or scribes, or rulers; of the Jewish people and their circum-

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\* We sometimes meet with an incidental reference to the words, "Now Nineveh was a great" city (ch. iii. 4), as if the past tense implied that Nineveh existed no longer. But most commentators think it of so little importance that they pass it by without remark. And even those who think that the book was written long after the destruction of Nineveh confess that this past tense, in the description of the city, is no sufficient evidence that the writer meant to say that the city was a thing of the past. Anyone writing the story after the visit of Jonah, and looking back to the time of the visit, could say, "Nineveh was a great city."

stances—in these times, or times after, will find none. If he puts his fingers on a word or a construction here or there which he inclines to think belongs to a post-Exilic age, he will find himself confronted not only with critics who believe that the book was written in the days of Jonah, but with critics who believe otherwise, who hold, as we have seen, that any linguistic peculiarities which may be found in the book are not inconsistent with a North Palestinian origin of the age of Jonah. As to any more substantial trace of a Chaldean, or Persian, or later age, there is none.

But not only is this negative conclusion justified by an examination of the book, we may safely reach a positive conclusion. It is generally admitted that both the substance and the colouring of the book are in keeping with the age and circumstances which the book presupposes. To prove this, or even to illustrate it adequately, would require many pages. Enough at present that it is not seriously denied. Questions may be asked about some of the events which it narrates, and they can be answered; but my contention is independent of them. Look at the book again. The author writes as one who was familiar with Nineveh and its ways—and all that he says of these has been abundantly corroborated—and he represents Nineveh, not as a city which had been out of existence for two hundred or four hundred years, but as then existent; and, to use a modern phrase, as actually having got a fresh lease of possession from the God of Heaven. Two hundred years after Jonah preached the preaching which God bade him, Nineveh was actually destroyed. No repentance could save it now. Prophets had fore-

told its doom, notably Nahum, of whose one written prophecy this is the one theme. And the destruction of the Assyrian capital was an event of so much interest to Israel that this prophet, seeing it afar off, exclaims exultantly, "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked one shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off" (ch. i. 15). The men of the post-Exilic age had only to visit the banks of the Tigris, as Herodotus and Xenophon had done, to see with their own eyes with what thoroughness the providence of God had fulfilled the words of His servant. But their age was not the age, nor as the age, of Jonah, who visited Nineveh two hundred years before its destruction, or of Nahum, who foretold its doom some fifty or sixty years before it was accomplished. We know somewhat of the Exilic age through the Books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and much of the post-Exilic age from Ezra and Nehemiah and the three last prophets — Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Now let the "narrator" of the mission of Jonah be a man of these times, and we have to account for two wonders—first, how he so entirely separated himself from the condition of things around him, as they were in the days of the latest prophets, as not to betray by the slightest sign that he had the least acquaintance with what was engrossing the mind and heart of that age; and secondly, how, without any aid but that of traditions which had survived the changes of some hundreds of years, he could reproduce—I might say re-create—a history of Jonah's mission so entirely conformable to the age and circumstances in which it

took place—and that without even adding to the story the great fact that, although Nineveh was spared in the days of Jonah, that great and wicked and oppressive city had long since perished, and its temples and palaces were now covered by the sands of the desert.

I would not limit the power of “Inspiration,” but on this theory we must confess to something of a double miracle of an unusual order. For, be it observed, we have not to do here with an abstract question of morals or religion, the treatment of which might have no concern with the writer’s environment; nor have we to do with the prediction of a great event hundreds of years in the future, in the delivery of which the Divine Spirit might raise the author out of himself and out of all his circumstances. We have to do with terrestrial and historical events, past and present; and we have to suppose an Inspiration which so overbore, overruled, and restrained the natural freedom and action of the narrator’s mind that he might as well have lived in another age. And this further miracle must be assumed—that Inspiration so transported the narrator into a former age, and revealed to him events and circumstances which took place in that age, that he was able to record them as if he had lived in the midst of them, and had known nothing of the age that followed.

The argument which I state thus briefly tells against every theory respecting the book which assigns its composition to a period hundreds of years after the time of Jonah’s alleged mission to Nineveh, and generations after the city had suffered the foretold doom of an “utter end of the place thereof” (Nah. i. 8).

An allegory, whatever might be the genius of its author, could not fail to betray the time and some of the environments of its origin. While a history based on some traditional fragments, and *written with a "didactic" purpose in relation to the age of its composition*, could scarcely help being full of evidence of the circumstances of its origin.

If the book is a truthful history, the problem of the time of its composition is of easy solution. Von Orelli calls "the first mission of a prophet of the true God to a centre of the heathen world" an "*epoch-making event*," and, repeating this well-chosen expression, he characterises "the mission of Jonah to Nineveh" as "*epoch-making in the old covenant*." Now, can we suppose it possible that the history of this epoch-making event should remain unwritten for three or four hundred years, or more; and that it should be written at any of these remote periods, as it has been written, in a way which, as I have endeavoured to show, involves assumptions respecting the Inspiration of the writer for which no parallel can be found in the Biblical records? Other epoch-making events and missions were recorded at times when it was possible to record them faithfully—the redemption from Egypt and the mission of Moses; the mission of Elijah and the then crisis through which Israel was passing; the epoch of the destruction of the Jewish state, and the prophetic ministries which preceded it; and the epoch of the restoration, with which the names of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah are associated. The epoch-making mission of Jonah followed immediately upon the epoch-making mission of Elijah. How should the latter be recorded so fully and circumstantially, and

the former be left untold, except so far as vague memories of it might float down on the traditions of ages? We may safely appeal to the analogies of Old Testament history in support of the conclusion that, if the mission of Jonah was epoch-making, the history of it must be traced to the period of its occurrence, and not left to what, in human speech, we may call "the chances of a future age."

The term "didactic" is repeated by one writer after another, as if it held within it an occult argument against the early writing of the book, if not against its proper historicity. The Book of Jonah *is* didactic. But what book of Holy Scripture is not didactic? All Bible history is written with a didactic end and purpose, and not for the mere sake of preserving historical information. But for the most part the spiritual teaching is to be found in the facts that are recorded, and not formally deduced from them by the writers. It is so with Jonah; and in this it is far less didactic in form than almost all the other prophetic books. Whereas you find Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, and others, including the three last, with earnest iteration, teaching truth, inculcating duty, and denouncing sin—in other words, whereas you find the books of these prophets didactic in form, as well as in an original underlying purpose, the Book of Jonah is absolutely without one moralising sentence from beginning to end. It tells facts and leaves the facts to speak for themselves. And this they do. The mission of Jonah, coming immediately after that of Elijah, and the demonstration on Mount Carmel that Jehovah is God alone, was mainly designed, as we have seen, so far as Israel was concerned, to teach



that God is not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also. In this consists its didactic character, and in this we find an argument for holding that the mission and the book were contemporaneous, and not separated by hundreds of years; the lesson of the mission and the lesson of the book being one, and both being very specially germane to the stage of Divine revelation which we find in the age which immediately succeeded the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

I object to the dating of the composition of the Book of Jonah long years after the destruction of Nineveh, and even after the Babylonian exile, on other grounds, to one of which I may refer in a sentence or two. To this late period after the days of the Biblical prophets, and to authors whose names, if they ever existed, have perished from history, and even from tradition, modern criticism relegates the composition of large portions of the Old Testament, which are thus rooted out of the times and environment in which we find them in the Bible, and transplanted into times and environments of which we know next to nothing. Scriptures are thus taken from where we can study them for ourselves, and hidden where the critic can deal with them in the dark very much as he pleases.

But there is one point on which we may insist. The critics whom I have specially in view, whether they be allegorists pure and simple, or whether they acknowledge a substratum of fact in the story, speak of the book as "inspired," and therefore entitled to a place in the "Canon." If the book be inspired, its author must have been inspired, and therefore a *prophet* in the proper sense of the word. Now, the prophets



were not obscure and unknown individuals, but public characters, whose office had been acknowledged by the community in which they lived. Delitzsch says, "Among the canonical books of the prophets are found only the writings of those who, in virtue of special gifts and calling, were commissioned publicly, whether by word of mouth or writing, to proclaim the word of God." Now, where shall we find an inspired man, a prophet, in the post-Exilian centuries, who wrote or put the seal of his authority upon the Book of Jonah? Ewald, whose words have been already quoted, considers it probable that "the book of the so-called minor prophets [including Jonah] was closed by Malachi's own hand." Dean Stanley says (in his nineteenth lecture on the *Jewish Church*), with perfect accuracy, "With Malachi the succession of prophets, which had continued unbroken from the time of Samuel, terminates, and a host of legends, Jewish and Mussulman, commemorate the extinction of the prophetic gift. . . . The religion of the Old Testament dispensation was fully revealed and constituted; not prophets were needed to declare it, but scribes to expound and defend it." Criticism has made no discovery since the days of Dean Stanley to invalidate this statement.

If the Book of Jonah is historical, as we believe it is—if it contains a true history of a mission on which this prophet was sent to Nineveh—it must be traced ultimately to Jonah himself. Tradition might preserve for a long period the bare fact of such a mission; the fact, too, of the miracle of the great fish, and the fact even of the repentance of the Ninevites—at least to a period preceding the destruction of Nineveh. But it

could not preserve the minute details which we find both in the beginning and in the end of the book, and, without a special miracle, could not help mixing up with the facts matter that was legendary. Written materials alone could enable a narrator of post-Exilic times to write the book as we have it; and such materials must have been based, in their turn, on information supplied by Jonah himself.

There is one objection to the supposition that Jonah himself wrote the book, which still turns up now and then, on which Dr. Pusey made a pertinent remark long ago: "It is strange that at any time beyond the babyhood of criticism any argument should be drawn from the fact that the prophet writes of himself in the third person. Manly criticism has been ashamed to use the argument as to the *Commentaries* of Cæsar or the *Anabasis* of Xenophon."

But we are reminded that the book does not claim to have been written by Jonah; to which objection it is sufficient answer that it does not disclaim to have been written by Jonah. If the objection is valid, it will tell against every prophetic book, and against almost every page in every prophetic book. Prophetic books tell us of discourses and predictions uttered by prophetic men; but they do not tell us who recorded these discourses and predictions on the prophetic page, with the exception of Jeremiah and his amanuensis, Baruch (ch. xxxvi.). And even in this case, with regard to the greater part of the Book of Jeremiah, we have to ask the question which we ask in other cases--Who could have recorded visions of which none but the prophets themselves were conscious, or Divine communications ("the word of

the Lord") of which none but themselves had any knowledge, but the prophets who were favoured with these visions and communications; or amanuenses like Baruch, who acted only as their hands in the mechanical operation of writing (Jer. xxxvi. 4)? In the Book of Jonah there are Divine communications of which none but Jonah himself could have primary knowledge; and if these are truthfully reported, the report of them must have come from the prophet himself.

The opinion that the book must be traced in the last instance to Jonah himself is strengthened by the character of the book, its tone, its limitations, and its alleged omissions. It is not a history, as already argued, of the man, the prophet, but of his mission to Nineveh; and nothing respecting the man is introduced into it except what bears on that mission. In the rigid absence of all extraneous matter, and the honest, unvarnished report of the prophet's conduct, we have evidence that the prophet himself must be credited with the recital of the story. The character of Old Testament history is often cited as evidence of its truth. The Jews, as a people, were as vain-glorious as any other people; and they had a reason of their own for exalting themselves above others, for they were a peculiar people, chosen of God to serve His great purposes in the world. Among the names most distinguished and honoured, both of God and man, in their history, are Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon. And yet there is no glorifying of these favoured ones; there is "an almost ostentatious exhibition of what was evil in them." In the scrupulous fairness and honesty of the history we may find proof that those

who wrote it were guided by higher principles than those that are common to men, and even that they were overruled by an influence higher than any which was natural to themselves.

Bearing this in mind, we come very near to a clear conviction as to the authorship of the Book of Jonah.

1. We are not at all surprised that Jonah should act the part ascribed to him in the book, remembering how other men, called by God to a high place and function in His Kingdom, fell into grievous sin. 2. We should be greatly surprised to find any one inspired of God ascribing to Jonah, for the purpose of an allegory, the unworthy part ascribed to him in the book, if there was no ground for it in fact; just as we should be surprised to find a moralist, for the sake of pointing a moral, ascribing to David in an allegory the shameful part which dishonours his name, if there were no grounds for it in fact. 3. We should be surprised if so important a mission as that of Jonah to Nineveh did not find a place in prophetic history, and if, in finding a place, it were not told in the plain and impartial spirit which distinguishes the whole inspired history of the nation.

Was it not, then, morally fitting that Jonah himself should tell the tale? He was still a prophet of the Lord. He tried to run away from the unwelcome task to which he was called; but his Master would not let him; and he went at last to preach the preaching with which he was charged. His spirit in the end was too like what it was in the beginning. But the Lord did not cast him off; He reasoned with him as a master reasons with a servant. And with this act of Divine condescension the story ends.

Nothing remained to be done now, but that, as a prophet, he should faithfully record the work which he had accomplished with so little honour to himself, but with so much benefit to others. It was not for him to think of the self-humiliation which the task involved. It may have been rather a satisfaction to be constrained thus to sacrifice his own credit to the glory of the Lord whom he confessed, even in the hour of his flight from His service, to be Jehovah, the God of Heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.



## NOTE FROM DOCTOR DELITZSCH.

I VENTURE to quote in this form the pronouncement of Delitzsch on the subject of Jonah in his "Messianic Prophecies." After reference to Obadiah, Joel, and Amos, and "New Testament Thoughts in the Midst of the Old Testament," he says:—

"The Book of Jonah also deserves to be mentioned here. Even the sending of Jonah to Nineveh, in order to call to repentance through threatened judgment, is unique in the Old Testament; for in every case except this the predictions of the prophets concerning the nations proceed from the prophetic watch-tower in the land of Israel. Even Jesus considered Himself as assigned to the circle of the people of Israel. Also the Apostles before the ascension of the Lord were limited to this narrow circle; and as later should Peter enter a heathen house with the preaching of salvation, he must first be freed through a heavenly vision from his opposition. Hence it is not remarkable that Jonah sought to avoid his mission to Nineveh. There is even a subjective justification for his being sullen when justice was visited upon the Ninevites instead of mercy. It was probably not common envy (as Acts xiii. 45; *cf.* 1 Thess. ii. 16); but he may have surmised that the

reception of the heathen would result in the loss of Israel's position as children. But through the feelings which were occasioned by the *kikayon* (Ricinus), which sprang up quickly and withered as quickly, God brings him the consciousness that also the heathen, who not less than Israel have Him as their Creator and Governor, are objects of His pity. Not only through the Ninevites, but also through the heathen sailors, He shows that the heathen are in no wise given up to be lost; that also among them neither noble humaneness nor, when God the only Holy One and His will are revealed, receptivity and obedience to faith are wanting, that therefore in the heathen world there is a preparatory activity of grace which is connected with the testimony of the conscience. That which Joel testifies in chap iii., that the heathen are embraced in the Divine decree, this the Book of Jonah teaches and confirms through facts. We may date it as we will, we may explain the wonderful preservation of the prophet for his calling as we will, the remarkable anticipation of the New Testament in the Old, and the utterances of Jesus, as Matt. xii. 39—41, show how fond He was of this book, in which He found prefigured His own way leading through the grave to the heathen."





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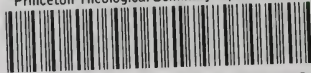
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